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CHAPTER XIII. TO END

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN

D.D., LITT.D.

alexander maclaren
the acts of the apostles

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TO THE REGIONS BEYOND

'Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. 4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John to their minister. 6. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: 7. Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. 9. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10. And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11. And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. 13. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.'—ACTS xiii. 1-13.

WE stand in this passage at the beginning of a great step forward. Philip and Peter had each played a part in the gradual expansion of the church beyond the limits of Judaism, but it was from the church at Antioch that the messengers went forth who completed the process. Both its locality and its composition made that natural.

I. The solemn designation of the missionaries is the first point in the narrative. The church at Antioch was not left without signs of Christ's grace and presence. It had its band of 'prophets and teachers.' As might be expected, four of the five named are

Hellenists,—that is, Jews born in Gentile lands, and speaking Gentile languages. Barnabas was a Cypriote, Simeon's byname of Niger ('Black') was probably given because of his dark complexion, which was probably caused by his birth in warmer lands. He may have been a North African, as Lucius of Cyrene was. Saul was from Tarsus, and only Manaen remains to represent the pure Palestinian Jew. His had been a strange course, from being foster-brother of the Herod who killed John to becoming a teacher in the church at Antioch. Barnabas was the leader of the little group, and the younger Pharisee from Tarsus, who had all along been Barnabas's *protégé*, brought up the rear.

The order observed in the list is a little window which shows a great deal. The first and last names all the world knows; the other three are never heard of again. Immortality falls on the two, oblivion swallows up the three. But it matters little whether our names are sounded in men's ears, if they are in the Lamb's book of life.

These five brethren were waiting on the Lord by fasting and prayer. Apparently they had reason to expect some divine communication, for which they were thus preparing themselves. Light will come to those who thus seek it. They were commanded to set apart two of their number for 'the work whereunto I have called them.' That work is not specified, and yet the two, like carrier pigeons on being let loose, make straight for their line of flight, and know exactly whither they are to go.

If we strictly interpret Luke's words ('I *have* called them'), a previous intimation from the Spirit had revealed to them the sphere of their work. In that case, the *separation* was only the recognition by the

brethren of the divine appointment. The inward call must come first, and no ecclesiastical designation can do more than confirm that. But the solemn designation by the Church identifies those who remain behind with the work of those who go forth; it throws responsibility for sympathy and support on the former, and it ministers strength and the sense of companionship to the latter, besides checking that tendency to isolation which accompanies earnestness. To go forth on even Christian service, unrecognised by the brethren, is not good for even a Paul.

But although Luke speaks of the Church sending them away, he takes care immediately to add that it was the Holy Ghost who 'sent them forth.' Ramsay suggests that 'sent them away' is not the meaning of the phrase in verse 3, but that it should be rendered 'gave them leave to depart.' In any case, a clear distinction is drawn between the action of the Church and that of the Spirit, which constituted Paul's real commission as an Apostle. He himself says that he was an Apostle, 'not from men, neither through man.'

II. The events in the first stage of the journey are next summarily presented. Note the local colouring in 'went down to Seleucia,' the seaport of Antioch, at the mouth of the river. The missionaries were naturally led to begin at Cyprus, as Barnabas's birth-place, and that of some of the founders of the church at Antioch.

So, for the first time, the Gospel went to sea, the precursor of so many voyages. It was an 'epoch-making moment' when that ship dropped down with the tide and put out to sea. Salamis was the nearest port on the south-eastern coast of Cyprus, and there they landed,—Barnabas, no doubt, familiar with all he saw;

Saul probably a stranger to it all. Their plan of action was that to which Paul adhered in all his after work,—to carry the Gospel to the Jew first, a proceeding for which the manner of worship in the synagogues gave facilities. No doubt, many such were scattered through Cyprus, and Barnabas would be well known in most.

They thus traversed the island from east to west. It is noteworthy that only now is John Mark's name brought in as their attendant. He had come with them from Antioch, but Luke will not mention him when he is telling of the sending forth of the other two, because Mark was not sent by the Spirit, but only chosen by his uncle, and his subsequent defection did not affect the completeness of their embassy. His entirely subordinate place is made obvious by the point at which he appears.

Nothing of moment happened on the tour till Paphos was reached. That was the capital, the residence of the pro-consul, and the seat of the foul worship of Venus. There the first antagonist was met. It is not Sergius Paulus, pro-consul though he was, who is the central figure of interest to Luke, but the sorcerer who was attached to his train. His character is drawn in Luke's description, and in Paul's fiery exclamation. Each has three clauses, which fall 'like the beats of a hammer.' 'Sorcerer, false prophet, Jew,' make a climax of wickedness. That a Jew should descend to dabble in the black art of magic, and play tricks on the credulity of ignorant people by his knowledge of some simple secrets of chemistry; that he should pretend to prophetic gifts which in his heart he knew to be fraud, and should be recreant to his ancestral faith, proved him to deserve the penetrating sentence

which Paul passed on him. He was a trickster, and knew that he was: his inspiration came from an evil source; he had come to hate righteousness of every sort.

Paul was not flinging bitter words at random, or yielding to passion, but was laying the black heart bare to the man's own eyes, that the seeing himself as God saw him might startle him into penitence. 'The corruption of the best is the worst.' The bitterest enemies of God's ways are those who have cast aside their early faith. A Jew who had stooped to be a juggler was indeed causing God's 'name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.'

He and Paul each recognised in the other his most formidable foe. Elymas instinctively felt that the pro-consul must be kept from listening to the teaching of these two fellow-countrymen, and 'sought to *pervert* him from the faith,' therein *perverting* (the same word is used in both cases) 'the right ways of the Lord'; that is, opposing the divine purpose. He was a specimen of a class who attained influence in that epoch of unrest, when the more cultivated and nobler part of Roman society had lost faith in the old gods, and was turning wistfully and with widespread expectation to the mysterious East for enlightenment.

So, like a ship which plunges into the storm as soon as it clears the pier-head, the missionaries felt the first dash of the spray and blast of the wind directly they began their work. Since this was their first encounter with a foe which they would often have to meet, the duel assumes importance, and we understand not only the fulness of the narrative, but the miracle which assured Paul and Barnabas of Christ's help, and was meant to diffuse its encouragement along the line of

their future work. For Elymas it was chastisement, which might lead him to cease to pervert the ways of the Lord, and himself begin to walk in them. Perhaps, after a season, he did see ‘the better Sun.’

Saul’s part in the incident is noteworthy. We observe the vivid touch, he ‘fastened his eyes on him.’ There must have been something very piercing in the fixed gaze of these flashing eyes. But Luke takes pains to prevent our thinking that Paul spoke from his own insight or was moved by human passion. He was ‘filled with the Holy Ghost,’ and, as His organ, poured out the scorching words that revealed the cowering apostate to himself, and announced the merciful punishment that was to fall. We need to be very sure that we are similarly filled before venturing to imitate the Apostle’s tone.

III. The shifting of the scene to the mainland presents some noteworthy points. It is singular that there is no preaching mentioned as having been attempted in Perga, or anywhere along the coast, but that the two evangelists seem to have gone at once across the great mountain range of Taurus to Antioch of Pisidia.

A striking suggestion is made by Ramsay to the effect that the reason was a sudden attack of the malarial fever which is endemic in the low-lying coast plains, and for which the natural remedy is to get up among the mountains. If so, the journey to Antioch of Pisidia may not have been in the programme to which John Mark had agreed, and his return to Jerusalem may have been due to this departure from the original intention. Be that as it may, he stands for us as a beacon, warning against hasty entrance on great undertakings of which we have not counted the cost, no less than against cowardly flight from

work, as soon as it begins to involve more danger or discomfort than we had reckoned on.

John Mark was willing to go a-missionarying as long as he was in Cyprus, where he was somebody and much at home, by his relationship to Barnabas; but when Perga and the climb over Taurus into strange lands came to be called for, his zeal and courage oozed out at his finger-ends, and he skulked back to his mother's house at Jerusalem. No wonder that Paul 'thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them.' But even such faint hearts as Mark's may take courage from the fact that he nobly retrieved his youthful error, and won back Paul's confidence, and proved himself 'profitable to him for the ministry.'

WHY SAUL BECAME PAUL

'Saul (who also is called Paul)' . . . —ACTS XIII. 9.

HITHERTO the Apostle has been known by the former of these names, henceforward he is known exclusively by the latter. Hitherto he has been second to his friend Barnabas, henceforward he is first. In an earlier verse of the chapter we read that 'Barnabas and Saul' were separated for their missionary work, and again, that it was 'Barnabas and Saul' for whom the governor of Cyprus sent, to hear the word of the Lord. But in a subsequent verse of the chapter we read that 'Paul and his company loosed from Paphos.'

The change in the order of the names is significant, and the change in the names not less so. Why was it that at this period the Apostle took up this new designation? I think that the coincidence between his name

and that of the governor of Cyprus, who believed at his preaching, Sergius Paulus, is too remarkable to be accidental. And though, no doubt, it was the custom for the Jews of that day, especially for those of them who lived in Gentile lands, to have, for convenience' sake, two names, one Jewish and one Gentile—one for use amongst their brethren, and one for use amongst the heathen—still we have no distinct intimation that the Apostle bore a Gentile name before this moment. And the fact that the name which he bears now is the same as that of his first convert, seems to me to point the explanation.

I take it, then, that the assumption of the name of Paul instead of the name of Saul occurred at this point, stood in some relation to his missionary work, and was intended in some sense as a memorial of his first victory in the preaching of the Gospel.

I think that there are lessons to be derived from the substitution of one of these names for the other which may well occupy us for a few moments.

I. First of all, then, the new name expresses a new nature.

Jesus Christ gave the Apostle whom He called to Himself in the early days, a new name, in order to prophesy the change which, by the discipline of sorrow and the communication of the grace of God, should pass over Simon Barjona, making him into a Peter, a 'Man of Rock.' With characteristic independence, Saul chooses for himself a new name, which shall express the change that he feels has passed over his inmost being. True, he does not assume it at his conversion, but that is no reason why we should not believe that he assumes it because he is beginning to understand what it is that has happened to him at his conversion.

The fact that he changes his name as soon as he throws himself into public and active life, is but gathering into one picturesque symbol his great principle; ‘If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away and all things are become new.’

So, dear brethren, we may, from this incident before us, gather this one great lesson, that the central heart of Christianity is the possession of a new life, communicated to us through faith in that Son of God, Who is the Lord of the Spirit. Wheresoever there is a true faith, there is a new nature. Opinions may play upon the surface of a man’s soul, like moonbeams on the silver sea, without raising its temperature one degree or sending a single beam into its dark caverns. And that is the sort of Christianity that satisfies a great many of you—a Christianity of opinion, a Christianity of surface creed, a Christianity which at the best slightly modifies some of your outward actions, but leaves the whole inner man unchanged.

Paul’s Christianity meant a radical change in his whole nature. He went out of Jerusalem a persecutor, he came into Damascus a Christian. He rode out of Jerusalem hating, loathing, despising Jesus Christ; he groped his way into Damascus, broken, bruised, clinging contrite to His feet, and clasping His Cross as his only hope. He went out proud, self-reliant, pluming himself upon his many prerogatives, his blue blood, his pure descent, his Rabbinical knowledge, his Pharisaical training, his external religious earnestness, his rigid morality; he rode into Damascus blind in the eyes, but seeing in the soul, and discerning that all these things were, as he says in his strong, vehement

way, ‘but dung’ in comparison with his winning Christ.

And his theory of conversion, which he preaches in all his Epistles, is but the generalisation of his own personal experience, which suddenly, and in a moment, smote his old self to shivers, and raised up a new life, with new tastes, views, tendencies, aspirations, with new allegiance to a new King. Such changes, so sudden, so revolutionary, cannot be expected often to take place amongst people who, like us, have been listening to Christian teaching all our lives. But unless there be this infusion of a new life into men’s spirits which shall make them love and long and aspire after new things that once they did not care for, I know not why we should speak of them as being Christians at all. The transition is described by Paul as ‘passing from death unto life.’ That cannot be a surface thing. A change which needs a new name must be a profound change. Has our Christianity revolutionised our nature in any such fashion? It is easy to be a Christian after the superficial fashion which passes muster with so many of us. A verbal acknowledgment of belief in truths which we never think about, a purely external performance of acts of worship, a subscription or two winged by no sympathy, and a fairly respectable life beneath the cloak of which all evil may burrow undetected—make the Christianity of thousands. Paul’s Christianity transformed him; does yours transform you? If it does not, are you quite sure that it *is* Christianity at all?

II. Then, again, we may take this change of name as being expressive of a life’s work.

Paul is a Roman name. He strips himself of his Jewish connections and relationships. His fellow-

countrymen who lived amongst the Gentiles were, as I said at the beginning of these remarks, in the habit of doing the same thing; but they carried *both* their names; their Jewish for use amongst their own people, their Gentile one for use amongst Gentiles. Paul seems to have altogether disused his old name of Saul. It was almost equivalent to seceding from Judaism. It is like the acts of the renegades whom one sometimes hears of, who are found by travellers, dressed in turban and flowing robes, and bearing some Turkish name, or like some English sailor, lost to home and kindred, who deserts his ship in an island of the Pacific, and drops his English name for a barbarous title, in token that he has given up his faith and his nationality.

So Paul, contemplating for his life's work preaching amongst the Gentiles, determines at the beginning, 'I lay down all of which I used to be proud. If my Jewish descent and privileges stand in my way I cast them aside. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee,"—all these I wrap together in one bundle, and toss them behind me that I may be the better able to help some to whom they would have hindered my access.' A man with a heart will throw off his silken robes that his arm may be bared to rescue, and his feet free to run to succour.

So we may, from the change of the Apostle's name, gather this lesson, never out of date, that the only way to help people is to go down to their level. If you want to bless men, you must identify yourself with them. It is no use standing on an eminence above them, and patronisingly talking down to them. You cannot scold, or hector, or lecture men into the possession and

acceptance of religious truth if you take a position of superiority. As our Master has taught us, if we want to make blind beggars see we must take the blind beggars by the hand.

The spirit which led the Apostle to change the name of Saul, with its memories of the royal dignity which, in the person of its great wearer, had honoured his tribe, for a Roman name is the same which he formally announces as a deliberately adopted law of his life. ‘To them that are without law I became as without law . . . that I might gain them that are without law . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.’

It is the very inmost principle of the Gospel. The principle that influenced the servant in this comparatively little matter, is the principle that influenced the Master in the mightiest of all events. ‘He who was in the form of God, and thought not equality with God a thing to be eagerly snatched at, made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man and in form as a servant, and became obedient unto death.’ ‘For as much as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part of the same’; and the mystery of incarnation came to pass, because when the Divine would help men, the only way by which the Infinite love could reach its end was that the Divine should become man; identifying Himself with those whom He would help, and stooping to the level of the humanity that He would lift.

And as it is the very essence and heart of Christ’s work, so, my brother, it is the condition of all work that benefits our fellows. It applies all round. We must stoop if we would raise. We must put away gifts, culture, everything that distinguishes us, and

come to the level of the men that we seek to help. Sympathy is the parent of all wise counsel, because it is the parent of all true understanding of our brethren's wants. Sympathy is the only thing to which people will listen, sympathy is the only disposition correspondent to the message that we Christians are entrusted with. For a Christian man to carry the Gospel of Infinite condescension to his fellows in a spirit other than that of the Master and the Gospel which he speaks, is an anomaly and a contradiction.

And, therefore, let us all remember that a vast deal of so-called Christian work falls utterly dead and profitless, for no other reason than this, that the doers have forgotten that they must come to the level of the men whom they would help, before they can expect to bless them.

You remember the old story of the heroic missionary whose heart burned to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst captives, and as there was no other way of reaching them, let himself be sold for a slave, and put out his hands to have the manacles fastened upon them. It is the law for all Christian service; become like men if you will help them,—‘To the weak as weak, all things to all men, that we might by all means save some.’

And, my brother, there was no obligation on Paul's part to do Christian work which does not lie on you.

III. Further, this change of name is a memorial of victory.

The name is that of Paul's first convert. He takes it, as I suppose, because it seemed to him such a blessed thing that at the very moment when he began to sow, God helped him to reap. He had gone out to his work, no doubt, with much trembling, with weakness and

fear. And lo! here, at once, the fields were white already to the harvest.

Great conquerors have been named from their victories; Africanus, Germanicus, Nelson of the Nile, Napier of Magdala, and the like. Paul names himself from the first victory that God gives him to win; and so, as it were, carries ever on his breast a memorial of the wonder that through him it had been given to preach, and that not without success, amongst the Gentiles ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ.’

That is to say, this man thought of it as his highest honour, and the thing best worthy to be remembered about his life, that God had helped him to help his brethren to know the common Master. Is that your idea of the best thing about a life? What would you, a professing Christian, like to have for an epitaph on your grave? ‘He was rich; he made a big business in Manchester’; ‘He was famous, he wrote books’; ‘He was happy and fortunate’; or, ‘He turned many to righteousness’? This man flung away his literary tastes, his home joys, and his personal ambition, and chose as that for which he would live, and by which he would fain be remembered, that he should bring dark hearts to the light in which he and they together walked.

His name, in its commemoration of his first success, would act as a stimulus to service and to hope. No doubt the Apostle, like the rest of us, had his times of indolence and languor, and his times of despondency when he seemed to have laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought. He had but to say ‘Paul’ to find the antidote to both the one and the other, and in the remembrance of the past to find a stimulus for service for the future, and a stimulus for hope for the

time to come. His first convert was to him the first drop that predicts the shower, the first primrose that prophesies the wealth of yellow blossoms and downy green leaves that will fill the woods in a day or two. The first convert ‘bears in his hand a glass which showeth many more.’ Look at the workmen in the streets trying to get up a piece of the roadway. How difficult it is to lever out the first paving stone from the compacted mass! But when once it has been withdrawn, the rest is comparatively easy. We can understand Paul’s triumph and joy over the first stone which he had worked out of the strongly cemented wall and barrier of heathenism; and his conviction that having thus made a breach, if it were but wide enough to let the end of his lever in, the fall of the whole was only a question of time. I suppose that if the old alchemists had turned but one grain of base metal into gold they might have turned tons, if only they had had the retorts and the appliances with which to do it. And so, what has brought one man’s soul into harmony with God, and given one man the true life, can do the same for all men. In the first fruits we may see the fields whitening to the harvest. Let us rejoice then, in any little work that God helps us to do, and be sure that if so great be the joy of the first fruits, great beyond speech will be the joy of the ingathering.

IV. And now last of all, this change of name is an index of the spirit of a life’s work.

‘Paul’ means ‘little’; ‘Saul’ means ‘desired.’ He abandons the name that prophesied of favour and honour, to adopt a name that bears upon its very front a profession of humility. His very name is the condensation into a word of his abiding conviction: ‘I am

less than the least of all saints.' Perhaps even there may be an allusion to his low stature, which may be pointed at in the sarcasm of his enemies that his letters were strong, though his bodily presence was 'weak.' If he was, as Renan calls him, 'an ugly little Jew,' the name has a double appropriateness.

But, at all events, it is an expression of the spirit in which he sought to do his work. The more lofty the consciousness of his vocation the more lowly will a true man's estimate of himself be. The higher my thought of what God has given me grace to do, the more shall I feel weighed down by the consciousness of my unfitness to do it. And the more grateful my remembrance of what He has enabled me to do, the more shall I wonder that I have been enabled, and the more profoundly shall I feel that it is not my strength but His that has won the victories.

So, dear brethren, for all hope, for all success in our work, for all growth in Christian grace and character, this disposition of lowly self-abasement and recognised unworthiness and infirmity is absolutely indispensable. The mountain-tops that lift themselves to the stars are barren, and few springs find their rise there. It is in the lowly valleys that the flowers grow and the rivers run. And it is they who are humble and lowly in heart to whom God gives strength to serve Him, and the joy of accepted service.

I beseech you, then, learn your true life's task. Learn how to do it by identifying yourselves with the humbler brethren whom you would help. Learn the spirit in which it must be done; the spirit of lowly self-abasement. And oh! above all, learn this, that unless you have the new life, the life of God in your hearts, you have no life at all.

Have you, my brother, that faith by which we receive into our spirits Christ's own Spirit, to be our life? If you have, then you are a new creature, with a new name, perhaps but dimly visible and faintly audible, amidst the imperfections of earth, but sure to shine out on the pages of the Lamb's Book of Life; and to be read 'with tumults of acclaim' before the angels of Heaven. 'I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it.'

JOHN MARK

'... John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.'—*Acts* xiii. 13.

THE few brief notices of John Mark in Scripture are sufficient to give us an outline of his life, and some inkling of his character. He was the son of a well-to-do Christian woman in Jerusalem, whose house appears to have been the resort of the brethren as early as the period of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison. As the cousin of Barnabas he was naturally selected to be the attendant and secular factotum of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. For some reason, faint-heartedness, lack of interest, levity of disposition, or whatever it may have been, he very quickly abandoned that office and returned to his home. His kindly-natured and indulgent relative sought to reinstate him in his former position on the second journey of Paul and himself. Paul's kinder severity refused to comply with the wish of his colleague Barnabas, and so they part, and Barnabas and Mark sail away to Cyprus, and drop out of the Acts of the Apostles. We hear no more about him until near the

end of the Apostle Paul's life, when the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon show him as again the companion of Paul in his captivity. He seems to have left him in Rome, to have gone to Asia Minor for a space, to have returned to the Apostle during his last imprisonment and immediately prior to his death, and then to have attached himself to the Apostle Peter, and under his direction and instruction to have written his Gospel.

Now these are the bones of his story; can we put flesh and blood upon them: and can we get any lessons out of them? I think we may; at any rate I am going to try.

I. Consider then, first, his—what shall I call it? well, if I may use the word which Paul himself designates it by, in its correct signification, we may call it his—apostasy.

It was not a departure from Christ, but it was a departure from very plain duty. And if you will notice the point of time at which Mark threw up the work that was laid upon him, you will see the reason for his doing so. The first place to which the bold evangelists went was Cyprus. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, which was perhaps the reason for selecting it as the place in which to begin the mission. For the same reason, because it was the native place of his relative, it would be very easy work for John Mark as long as they stopped in Cyprus, among his friends, with people that knew him, and with whom no doubt he was familiar. But as soon as they crossed the strait that separated the island from the mainland, and set foot upon the soil of Asia Minor, so soon he turned tail; like some recruit that goes into battle, full of fervour, but as soon as the bullets begin to 'ping'

makes the best of his way to the rear. He was quite ready for missionary work as long as it was easy work; quite ready to do it as long as he was moving upon known ground and there was no great call upon his heroism, or his self-sacrifice; he does not wait to test the difficulties, but is frightened by the imagination of them, does not throw himself into the work and see how he gets on with it, but before he has gone a mile into the land, or made any real experience of the perils and hardships, has had quite enough of it, and goes away back to his mother in Jerusalem.

Yes, and we find exactly the same thing in all kinds of strenuous life. Many begin to run, but one after another, as 'lap' after 'lap' of the racecourse is got over, has had enough of it, and drops on one side; a hundred started, and at the end the field is reduced to three or four. All you men that have grey hairs on your heads can remember many of your companions that set out in the course with you, 'did run well' for a little while: what has become of them? This thing hindered one, the other thing hindered another; the swiftly formed resolution died down as fast as it blazed up; and there are perhaps some three or four that, 'by patient continuance in well-doing,' have been tolerably faithful to their juvenile ideal; and to use the homely word of the homely Abraham Lincoln, kept 'pegging away' at what they knew to be the task that was laid upon them.

This is very 'threadbare' morality, very very familiar and old-fashioned teaching; but I am accustomed to believe that no teaching is threadbare until it is practised; and that however well-worn the platitudes may be, you and I want them once again unless we have obeyed them, and done all which they enjoin.

And so in regard to every career which has in it anything of honour and of effort, let John Mark teach us the lesson not swiftly to begin and inconsiderately to venture upon a course, but once begun to let nothing discourage, ‘nor bate one jot of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer right onward.’

And still further and more solemnly still, how like this story is to the experience of hundreds and thousands of young Christians! Any man who has held such an office as I hold, for as many years as I have filled it, will have his memory full—and, may I say, his eyes not empty—of men and women who began like this man, earnest, fervid, full of zeal, and who, like him, have slackened in their work; who were Sunday-school teachers, workers amongst the poor, I know not what, when they were young men and women, and who now are idle and unprofitable servants.

Some of you, dear brethren, need the word of exhortation and earnest beseeching to contrast the sluggishness, the indolence of your present, with the brightness and the fervour of your past. And I beseech you, do not let your Christian life be like that snow that is on the ground about us to-day—when it first lights upon the earth, radiant and white, but day by day gets more covered with a veil of sooty blackness until it becomes dark and foul.

Many of us have to acknowledge that the fervour of early days has died down into coldness. The river that leapt from its source rejoicing, and bickered amongst the hills in such swift and musical descent, creeps sluggish and almost stagnant amongst the flats of later life, or has been lost and swallowed up altogether in the thirsty and encroaching sands of a barren worldliness. Oh! my friends, let us all ponder

this lesson, and see to it that no repetition of the apostasy of this man darken our Christian lives and sadden our Christian conscience.

II. And now let me ask you to look next, in the development of this little piece of biography, to Mark's eclipse.

Paul and Barnabas differed about how to treat the renegade. Which of them was right? Would it have been better to have put him back in his old post, and given him another chance, and said nothing about the failure; or was it better to do what the sterner wisdom of Paul did, and declare that a man who had once so forgotten himself and abandoned his work was not the man to put in the same place again? Barnabas' highest quality, as far as we know, was a certain kind of broad generosity and rejoicing to discern good in all men. He was a 'son of consolation'; the gentle kindness of his natural disposition, added to the ties of relationship, influenced him in his wish regarding his cousin Mark. He made a mistake. It would have been the cruellest thing that could have been done to his relative to have put him back again without acknowledgment, without repentance, without his riding quarantine for a bit, and holding his tongue for a while. He would not then have known his fault as he ought to have known it, and so there would never have been the chance of his conquering it.

The Church manifestly sympathised with Paul, and thought that he took the right view; for the contrast is very significant between the unsympathising silence which the narrative records as attending the departure of Barnabas and Mark—'Barnabas took Mark, and sailed away to Cyprus'—and the emphasis with which it tells us that the other partner in the dispute, Paul,

'took Silas and departed, being recommended by the brethren to the grace of God.'

The people at Antioch had no doubt who was right, and I think they were right in so deciding. So let us learn that God treats His renegades as Paul treated Mark, and not as Barnabas would have treated him. He is ready, even infinitely ready, to forgive and to restore, but desires to see the consciousness of the sin first, and desires, before large tasks are re-committed to hands that once have dropped them, to have some kind of evidence that the hands have grown stronger and the heart purified from its cowardice and its selfishness. Forgiveness does not mean impunity. The infinite mercy of God is not mere weak indulgence which sc deals with a man's failures and sins as to convey the impression that these are of no moment whatsoever. And Paul's severity which said: 'No, such work is not fit for such hands until the heart has been "broken and healed,"' is of a piece with God's severity which is love. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Let us learn the difference between a weak charity which loves too foolishly, and therefore too selfishly, to let a man inherit the fruit of his doings, and the large mercy which knows how to take the bitterness out of the chastisement, and yet knows how to chastise.

And still further, this which I have called Mark's eclipse may teach us another lesson, viz., that the punishment for shirking work is to be denied work, just as the converse is true, that in God's administration of the world and of His Church, the reward for faithful work is to get more to do, and the filling a narrower sphere is the sure way to have a wider sphere to fill. So if a man abandons plain duties, then

he will get no work to do. And that is why so many Christian men and women are idle in this world; and stand in the market-place, saying, with a certain degree of truth, ‘No man hath hired us.’ No; because so often in the past tasks have been presented to you, forced upon you, almost pressed into your unwilling hands, that you have refused to take; and you are not going to get any more. You have been asked to work,—I speak now to professing Christians—duties have been pressed upon you, fields of service have opened plainly before you, and you have not had the heart to go into them. And so you stand idle all the day now, and the work goes to other people that will do it. Thus God honours them, and passes you by.

Mark sails away to Cyprus, he does not go back to Jerusalem; he and Barnabas try to get up some little schismatic sort of mission of their own. Nothing comes of it; nothing ought to have come of it. He drops out of the story; he has no share in the joyful conflicts and sacrifices and successes of the Apostle. When he heard how Paul, by God’s help, was flaming like a meteor from East to West, do you not think he wished that he had not been such a coward? When the Lord was opening doors, and he saw how the work was prospering in the hands of ancient companions, and Silas filled the place that he might have filled, if he had been faithful to God, do you not think the bitter thought occupied his mind, of how he had flung away what never could come back to him now? The punishment of indolence is absolute idleness.

So, my friends, let us learn this lesson, that the largest reward that God can give to him that has been faithful in a few things, is to give him many things to be faithful over. Beware, all of you professing Chris-

tians, lest to you should come the fate of the slothful servant with his one buried talent, to whom the punishment of burying it unused was to lose it altogether; according to that solemn word which was fulfilled in the temporal sphere in this story on which I am commenting: ‘To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away.’

III. Again consider the process of recovery.

Concerning it we read nothing indeed in Scripture; but concerning it we know enough to be able at least to determine what its outline must have been. The silent and obscure years of compulsory inactivity had their fruit, no doubt. There is only one road, with well-marked stages, by which a backsliding or apostate Christian can return to his Master. And that road has three halting-places upon it, through which the heart must pass if it have wandered from its early faith, and falsified its first professions. The first of them is the consciousness of the fall, the second is the resort to the Master for forgiveness; and the last is the deepened consecration to Him.

The patriarch Abraham, in a momentary lapse from faith to sense, thought himself compelled to leave the land to which God had sent him, because a famine threatened; and when he came back from Egypt, as the narrative tells us with deep significance, he went to the ‘place where he had pitched his tent at the beginning; to the altar which he had reared at the first.’ Yes, my friends, we must begin over again, tread all the old path, enter by the old wicket-gate, once more take the place of the penitent, once more make acquaintance with the pardoning Christ, once more devote ourselves in renewed consecration to His service. No man that wanders into the wilderness but

comes back by the King's highway, if he comes back at all.

IV. And so lastly, notice the reinstatement of the penitent renegade.

If you turn at your leisure to the remaining notices of John Mark in Scripture, you will find, in two of Paul's Epistles of the captivity, viz., those to the Colossians and Philemon, references to him; and these references are of a very interesting and beautiful nature. Paul says that in Rome Mark was one of the four born Jews who had been a cordial and a comfort to him in his imprisonment. He commends him, in the view of a probable journey, to the loving reception of the church at Colosse, as if they knew something derogatory to his character, the impression of which the Apostle desired to remove. He sends to Philemon the greetings of the repentant renegade in strange juxtaposition with the greetings of two other men, one who was an apostate at the end of his career instead of at the beginning, and of whom we do not read that he ever came back, and one who all his life long is the type of a faithful friend and companion. 'Mark, Demas, Luke' are bracketed as greeting Philemon; the first a runaway that came back, the second a fugitive who, so far as we know, never returned, and the last the faithful friend throughout.

And then in Paul's final Epistle, and in almost the last words of it, we read his request to Timothy. 'Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' The first notice of him was: 'They had John to their minister'; the last word about him is: 'he is profitable for the ministry.' The Greek words in the original are not identical, but their meaning is substantially the same. So notwithstanding the failure,

notwithstanding the wise refusal of Paul years before to have anything more to do with him, he is now reinstated in his old office, and the aged Apostle, before he dies, would like to have the comfort of his presence once more at his side. Is not the lesson out of that, this eternal Gospel that even early failures, recognised and repented of, may make a man better fitted for the tasks from which once he fled? Just as they tell us—I do not know whether it is true or not, it will do for an illustration—just as they tell us that a broken bone renewed is stronger at the point of fracture than it ever was before, so the very sin that we commit, when once we know it for a sin, and have brought it to Christ for forgiveness, may minister to our future efficiency and strength. The Israelites fought twice upon one battlefield. On the first occasion they were shamefully defeated; on the second, on the same ground, and against the same enemies, they victoriously emerged from the conflict, and reared the stone which said, ‘Ebenezer!’ ‘Hitherto the Lord hath helped us.’

And so the temptations which have been sorest may be overcome, the sins into which we most naturally fall we may put our foot upon; the past is no specimen of what the future may be. The page that is yet to be written need have none of the blots of the page that we have turned over shining through it. Sin which we have learned to know for sin and to hate, teaches us humility, dependence, shows us where our weak places are. Sin which is forgiven knits us to Christ with deeper and more fervid love, and results in a larger consecration. Think of the two ends of this man’s life—flying like a frightened hare from the very first suspicion of danger or of difficulty, sulking in his solitude, apart from all the joyful stir of consecration

and of service; and at last made an evangelist to proclaim to the whole world the story of the Gospel of the Servant. God works with broken reeds, and through them breathes His sweetest music.

So, dear brethren, ‘Take with you words, and return unto the Lord; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously,’ and the answer will surely be:—‘I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely; I will be as the dew unto Israel.’

THE FIRST PREACHING IN ASIA MINOR

‘Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. 30. But God raised Him from the dead: 31. And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people. 32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee. 34. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35. Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36. For David, after he had sорed his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. 38. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.’—ACTS xiii. 26-39.

THE extended report of Paul’s sermon in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia marks it, in accordance with Luke’s method, as the first of a series. It was so because, though the composition of the audience was identical with that of those in the synagogues of Cyprus, this was the beginning of the special work of the tour, the preaching in the cities of Asia Minor. The part of the

address contained in the passage falls into three sections,—the condensed narrative of the Gospel facts (vs. 26-31), the proof that the resurrection was prophesied (vs. 32-37), and the pungent personal application (v. 38 to end).

I. The substance of the narrative coincides, as it could not but do, with Peter's sermons, but yet with differences, partly due to the different audience, partly to Paul's idiosyncrasy. After the preceding historical *r  sum  *, he girds himself to his proper work of proclaiming the Gospel, and he marks the transition in verse 26 by reiterating his introductory words.

His audience comprised the two familiar classes of Jews and Gentile proselytes, and he seeks to win the ears of both. His heart goes out in his address to them all as 'brethren,' and in his classing himself and Barnabas among them as receivers of the message which he has to proclaim. What skill, if it were not something much more sacred, even humility and warm love, lies in that 'to us is the word of this salvation sent'! He will not stand above them as if he had any other possession of his message than they might have. He, too, has received it, and what he is about to say is not his word, but God's message to them and him. That is the way to preach.

Notice, too, how skilfully he introduces the narrative of the rejection of Jesus as the reason why the message has now come to them his hearers away in Antioch. It is 'sent forth' 'to us,' Asiatic Jews, *for* the people in the sacred city would not have it. Paul does not prick his hearers' consciences, as Peter did, by charging home the guilt of the rejection of Jesus on them. They had no share in that initial crime. There is a faint purpose of dissociating himself and his hearers from the

people of Jerusalem, to whom the Dispersion were accustomed to look up, in the designation, ‘they that dwell in Jerusalem, and *their* rulers.’ Thus far the Antioch Jews had had hands clean from that crime; they had now to choose whether they would mix themselves up with it.

We may further note that Paul says nothing about Christ’s life of gentle goodness, His miracles or teaching, but concentrates attention on His death and resurrection. From the beginning of his ministry these were the main elements of his ‘Gospel’ (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). The full significance of that death is not declared here. Probably it was reserved for subsequent instruction. But it and the Resurrection, which interpreted it, are set in the forefront, as they should always be. The main point insisted on is that the men of Jerusalem were fulfilling prophecy in slaying Jesus. With tragic deafness, they knew not the voices of the prophets, clear and unanimous as they were, though they heard them every Sabbath of their lives, and yet they fulfilled them. A prophet’s words had just been read in the synagogue; Paul’s words might set some hearer asking whether a veil had been over his heart while his ears had heard the sound of the word.

The Resurrection is established by the only evidence for a historical fact, the testimony of competent eye-witnesses. Their competence is established by their familiar companionship with Jesus during His whole career; their opportunities for testing the reality of the fact, by the ‘many days’ of His appearances.

Paul does not put forward his own testimony to the Resurrection, though we know, from 1 Corinthians xv. 8, that he regarded Christ’s appearance to him as being equally valid evidence with that afforded by the

other appearances; but he distinguishes between the work of the Apostles, as ‘witnesses unto the people’—that is, the Jews of Palestine—and that of Barnabas and himself. They had to bear the message to the regions beyond. The Apostles and he had the same work, but different spheres.

II. The second part turns with more personal address to his hearers. Its purport is not so much to preach the Resurrection, which could only be proved by testimony, as to establish the fact that it was the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers. Note how the idea of fulfilled prophecy runs in Paul’s head. The Jews had *fulfilled* it by their crime; God *fulfilled* it by the Resurrection. This reiteration of a key-word is a mark of Paul’s style in his Epistles, and its appearance here attests the accuracy of the report of his speech.

The second Psalm, from which Paul’s first quotation is made, is prophetic of Christ, inasmuch as it represents in vivid lyrical language the vain rebellion of earthly rulers against Messiah, and Jehovah’s establishing Him and His kingdom by a steadfast decree. Peter quoted its picture of the rebels, as fulfilled in the coalition of Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish rulers against Christ. The Messianic reference of the Psalm, then, was already seen; and we may not be going too far if we assume that Jesus Himself had included it among things written in the Psalms ‘concerning Himself,’ which He had explained to the disciples after the Resurrection. It depicts Jehovah speaking to Messiah, *after* the futile attempts of the rebels: ‘This day have I begotten Thee.’ That day is a definite point in time. The Resurrection was a birth from the dead; so Paul, in Colossians i. 18, calls Jesus ‘the first begotten from the dead.’ Romans i. 4, ‘declared to be the Son of

God . . . by the resurrection from the dead,' is the best commentary on Paul's words here.

The second and third quotations must apparently be combined, for the second does not specifically refer to resurrection, but it promises to 'you,' that is to those who obey the call to partake in the Messianic blessings, a share in the 'sure' and enduring 'mercies of David'; and the third quotation shows that not 'to see corruption' was one of these 'mercies.' That implies that the speaker in the Psalm was, in Paul's view, David, and that his words were his believing answer to a divine promise. But David was dead. Had the 'sure mercy' proved, then, a broken reed? Not so: for Jesus, who is Messiah, and is God's 'Holy One' in a deeper sense than David was, has not seen corruption. The Psalmist's hopes are fulfilled in Him, and through Him, in all who will 'eat' that their 'souls may live.'

III. But Paul's yearning for his brethren's salvation is not content with proclaiming the fact of Christ's resurrection, nor with pointing to it as fulfilling prophecy; he gathers all up into a loving, urgent offer of salvation for every believing soul, and solemn warning to despisers. Here the whole man flames out. Here the characteristic evangelical teaching, which is sometimes ticketed as 'Pauline' by way of stigma, is heard. Already had he grasped the great antithesis between Law and Gospel. Already his great word 'justified' has taken its place in his terminology. The essence of the Epistles to Romans and Galatians is here. Justification is the being pronounced and treated as not guilty. Law cannot justify. 'In Him' we are justified. Observe that this is an advance on the previous statement that 'through Him' we receive remission of sins.

'In Him' points, though but incidentally and slightly, to the great truth of incorporation with Jesus, of which Paul had afterwards so much to write. The justifying in Christ is complete and absolute. And the sole sufficient condition of receiving it is faith. But the greater the glory of the light the darker the shadow which it casts. The broad offer of complete salvation has ever to be accompanied with the plain warning of the dread issue of rejecting it. Just because it is so free and full, and to be had on such terms, the warning has to be rung into deaf ears, 'Beware *therefore!*' Hope and fear are legitimately appealed to by the Christian evangelist. They are like the two wings which may lift the soul to soar to its safe shelter in the Rock of Ages.

LUTHER—A STONE ON THE CAIRN

'For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.'—ACTS xiii. 36, 37.

I TAKE these words as a motto rather than as a text. You will have anticipated the use which I purpose to make of them in connection with the Luther Commemoration. They set before us, in clear sharp contrast, the distinction between the limited, transient work of the servants and the unbounded, eternal influence of the Master. The former are servants, and that but for a time; they do their work, they are laid in the grave, and as their bodies resolve into their elements, so their influence, their teaching, the institutions which they may have founded, disintegrate and decay. He lives. His relation to the world is not as theirs; He is 'not for an age, but for all time.'

Death is not the end of His work. His Cross is the eternal foundation of the world's hope. His life is the ultimate, perfect revelation of the divine Nature which can never be surpassed, or fathomed, or antiquated. Therefore the last thought, in all commemorations of departed teachers and guides, should be of Him who gave them all the force that they had; and the final word should be: 'They were not suffered to continue by reason of death, this Man continueth ever.'

In the same spirit then as the words of my text, and taking them as giving me little more than a starting-point and a framework, I draw from them some thoughts appropriate to the occasion.

I. First, we have to think about the limited and transient work of this great servant of God.

The miner's son, who was born in that little Saxon village four hundred years ago, presents at first sight a character singularly unlike the traditional type of mediæval Church fathers and saints. Their ascetic habits, and the repressive system under which they were trained, withdraw them from our sympathy; but this sturdy peasant, with his full-blooded humanity, unmistakably a man, and a man all round, is a new type, and looks strangely out of place amongst doctors and mediæval saints.

His character, though not complex, is many-sided and in some respects contradictory. The face and figure that look out upon us from the best portraits of Luther tell us a great deal about the man. Strong, massive, not at all elegant; he stands there, firm and resolute, on his own legs, grasping a *Bible* in a muscular hand. There is plenty of animalism—a source of power as well as of weakness—in the thick neck; an iron will in the square chin; eloquence on the full, loose lips;

a mystic, dreamy tenderness and sadness in the steadfast eyes—altogether a true king and a leader of men !

The first things that strike one in the character are the iron will that would not waver, the indomitable courage that knew no fear, the splendid audacity that, single-handed, sprang into the arena for a contest to the death with Pope, Emperors, superstitions, and devils; the insight that saw the things that were ‘hid from the wise and prudent,’ and the answering sincerity that would not hide what he saw, nor say that he saw what he did not.

But there was a great deal more than that in the man. He was no mere brave revolutionary, he was a cultured scholar, abreast of all the learning of his age, capable of logic-chopping and scholastic disputation on occasion, and but too often the victim of his own over-subtle refinements. He was a poet, with a poet’s dreaminess and waywardness, fierce alternations of light and shade, sorrow and joy. All living things whispered and spoke to him, and he walked in communion with them all. Little children gathered round his feet, and he had a big heart of love for all the weary and the sorrowful.

Everybody knows how he could write and speak. He made the German language, as we may say, lifting it up from a dialect of boors to become the rich, flexible, cultured speech that it is. And his Bible, his single-handed work, is one of the colossal achievements of man; like Stonehenge or the Pyramids. ‘His words were half-battles,’ ‘they were living creatures that had hands and feet’; his speech, direct, strong, homely, ready to borrow words from the kitchen or the gutter, is unmatched for popular eloquence and impression. There was music in the man. His flute solaced his

lonely hours in his home at Wittemberg; and the Marseillaise of the Reformation, as that grand hymn of his has been called, came, words and music, from his heart. There was humour in him, coarse horseplay often; an honest, hearty, broad laugh frequently, like that of a Norse god. There were coarse tastes in him, tastes of the peasant folk from whom he came, which clung to him through life, and kept him in sympathy with the common people, and intelligible to them. And withal there was a constitutional melancholy, aggravated by his weary toils, perilous fightings, and fierce throes, which led him down often into the deep mire where there was no standing; and which sighs through all his life. The penitential Psalms and Paul's wail: 'O wretched man that I am,' perhaps never woke more plaintive echo in any human heart than they did in Martin Luther's.

Faults he had, gross and plain as the heroic mould in which he was cast. He was vehement and fierce often; he was coarse and violent often. He saw what he did see so clearly, that he was slow to believe that there was anything that he did not see. He was oblivious of counterbalancing considerations, and given to exaggerated, incautious, unguarded statements of precious truths. He too often aspired to be a driver rather than a leader of men; and his strength of will became obstinacy and tyranny. It was too often true that he had dethroned the pope of Rome to set up a pope at Wittemberg. And foul personalities came from his lips, according to the bad controversial fashion of his day, which permitted a licence to scholars that we now forbid to fishwives.

All that has to be admitted; and when it is all admitted, what then? This is a fastidious generation;

Erasmus is its heroic type a great deal more than Luther—I mean among the cultivated classes of our day—and that very largely because in Erasmus there is no quick sensibility to religious emotion as there is in Luther, and no inconvenient fervour. The faults are there—coarse, plain, palpable—and perhaps more than enough has been made of them. Let us remember, as to his violence, that he was following the fashion of the day; that he was fighting for his life; that when a man is at death-grips with a tiger he may be pardoned if he strikes without considering whether he is going to spoil the skin or not; and that on the whole you cannot throttle snakes in a graceful attitude. Men fought then with bludgeons; they fight now with dainty polished daggers, dipped in cold, colourless poison of sarcasm. Perhaps there was less malice in the rougher old way than in the new.

The faults are there, and nobody who is not a fool would think of painting that homely Saxon peasant-monk's face without the warts and the wrinkles. But it is quite as unhistorical, and a great deal more wicked, to paint nothing but the warts and wrinkles; to rake all the faults together and make the most of them; and present them in answer to the question: 'What sort of a man was Martin Luther?'

As to the work that he did, like the work of all of us, it had its limitations, and it will have its end. The impulse that he communicated, like all impulses that are given from men, will wear out its force. New questions will arise of which the dead leaders never dreamed, and in which they can give no counsel. The perspective of theological thought will alter, the centre of interest will change, a new dialect will begin to be spoken. So it comes to pass that all religious teachers

and thinkers are left behind, and that their words are preserved and read rather for their antiquarian and historical interest than because of any impulse or direction for the present which may linger in them; and if they founded institutions, these too, in their time, will crumble and disappear.

But I do not mean to say that the truths which Luther rescued from the dust of centuries, and impressed upon the conscience of Teutonic Europe, are getting antiquated. I only mean that his connection with them and his way of putting them, had its limitations and will have its end: ‘This man, having served his own generation by the will of God, was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption.’

What *were* the truths, what was his contribution to the illumination of Europe, and to the Church? Three great principles—which perhaps closer analysis might reduce to one; but which for popular use, on such an occasion as the present, had better be kept apart—will state his service to the world.

There were three men in the past who, as it seems to me, reach out their hands to one another across the centuries—Paul, St. Augustine, and Martin Luther. The three very like each other, all three of them joining the same subtle speculative power with the same capacity of religious fervour, and of flaming up at the contemplation of divine truth; all of them gifted with the same exuberant, and to fastidious eyes, incorrect eloquence; all three trained in a school of religious thought of which each respectively was destined to be the antagonist and all but the destroyer.

The young Pharisee, on the road to Damascus, blinded, bewildered, with all that vision flaming upon him, sees in its light his past, which he thought had been so

pure, and holy, and God-serving, and amazedly discovers that it had been all a sin and a crime, and a persecution of the divine One. Beaten from every refuge, and lying there, he cries: ‘What wouldst Thou have me to do, Lord?’

The young Manichean and profligate in the fourth century, and the young monk in his convent in the fifteenth, passed through a similar experience;—different in form, identical in substance—with that of Paul the persecutor. And so Paul’s Gospel, which was the description and explanation, the rationale, of his own experience, became their Gospel; and when Paul said: ‘Not by works of righteousness which our own hands have done, but by His mercy He saved us’ (Titus iii. 5), the great voice from the North African shore, in the midst of the agonies of barbarian invasions and a falling Rome, said ‘Amen. Man lives by faith,’ and the voice from the Wittemberg convent, a thousand years after, amidst the unspeakable corruption of that phosphorescent and decaying Renaissance, answered across the centuries, ‘It is true!’ ‘Herein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.’ Luther’s word to the world was Augustine’s word to the world; and Luther and Augustine were the echoes of Saul of Tarsus—and Paul learned his theology on the Damascus road, when the voice bade him go and proclaim ‘forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me’ (Acts xxvi. 18). That is Luther’s first claim on our gratitude, that he took this truth from the shelves where it had reposed, dust-covered, through centuries, that he lifted this truth from the bier where it had lain, smothered with sacerdotal garments, and called with a loud voice, ‘I say unto thee, arise!’ and that now the common-

place of Christianity is this: All men are sinful men, justice condemns us all, our only hope is God's infinite mercy, that mercy comes to us all in Jesus Christ that died for us, and he that gets that into his heart by simple faith, he is forgiven, pure, and he is an heir of Heaven.

There are other aspects of Christian truth which Luther failed to apprehend. The Gospel is, of course, not merely a way of reconciliation and forgiveness. He pushed his teaching of the uselessness of good works as a means of salvation too far. He said rash and exaggerated things in his vehement way about the 'justifying power' of faith alone. Doubtless his language was often overstrained, and his thoughts one-sided, in regard to subjects that need very delicate handling and careful definition. But after all this is admitted, it remains true that his strong arm tossed aside the barriers and rubbish that had been piled across the way by which prodigals could go home to their Father, and made plain once more the endless mercy of God, and the power of humble faith. He was right when he declared that whatever heights and depths there may be in God's great revelation, and however needful it is for a complete apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus that these should find their place in the creed of Christendom, still the firmness with which that initial truth of man's sinfulness and his forgiveness and acceptance through simple faith in Christ is held, and the clear earnestness with which it is proclaimed, are the test of a standing or a falling Church.

And then closely connected with this central principle, and yet susceptible of being stated separately, are the other two; of neither of which do I think it

necessary to say more than a word. Following on that great discovery—for it was a discovery—by the monk in his convent, of justification by faith, there comes the other principle of the entire sweeping away of all priesthood, and the direct access to God of every individual Christian soul. There are no more external rites to be done by a designated and separate class. There is one sacrificing Priest, and one only, and that is Jesus Christ, who has sacrificed Himself for us all, and there are no other priests, except in the sense in which every Christian man is a priest and minister of the most high God. And no man comes between me and my Father; and no man has power to do anything for me which brings me any grace, except in so far as mine own heart opens for the reception, and mine own faith lays hold of the grace given.

Luther did not carry that principle so far as some of us modern Nonconformists carry it. He left illogical fragments of sacramentarian and sacerdotal theories in his creed and in his Church. But, for all that, we owe mainly to him the clear utterance of that thought, the warm breath of which has thawed the ice chains which held Europe in barren bondage. Notwithstanding the present portentous revival of sacerdotalism, and the strange turning again of portions of society to these beggarly elements of the past, I believe that the figments of a sacrificing priesthood and sacramental efficacy will never again permanently darken the sky in this land, the home of the men who speak the tongue of Milton, and owe much of their religious and political freedom to the reformation of Luther.

And the third point, which is closely connected with these other two, is this, the declaration that every illuminated Christian soul has a right and is bound to

study God's Word without the Church at his elbow to teach him what to think about it. It was Luther's great achievement that, whatever else he did, he put the Bible into the hands of the common people. In that department and region, his work perhaps bears more distinctly the traces of limitation and imperfection than anywhere else, for he knew nothing—how could he?—of the difficult questions of this day in regard to the composition and authority of Scripture, nor had he thought out his own system or done full justice to his own principle.

He could be as inquisitorial and as dogmatic as any Dominican of them all. He believed in force; he was as ready as all his fellows were to invoke the aid of the temporal power. The idea of the Church, as helped and sustained—which means fettered, and weakened, and paralysed—by the civic government, bewitched him as it did his fellows. We needed to wait for George Fox, and Roger Williams, and more modern names still, before we understood fully what was involved in the rejection of priesthood, and the claim that God's Word should speak directly to each Christian soul. But for all that, we largely owe to Luther the creed that looks in simple faith to Christ, a Church without a priest, in which every man is a priest of the Most High,—the only true democracy that the world will ever see—and a Church in which the open Bible and the indwelling Spirit are the guides of every humble soul within its pale. These are his claims on our gratitude.

Luther's work had its limitations and its imperfections, as I have been saying to you. It will become less and less conspicuous as the ages go on. It cannot be otherwise. That is the law of the world. As a

whole green forest of the carboniferous era is represented now in the rocks by a thin seam of coal, no thicker than a sheet of paper, so the stormy lives and the large works of the men that have gone before, are compressed into a mere film and line, in the great cliff that slowly rises above the sea of time and is called the history of the world.

II. Be it so; be it so! Let us turn to the other thought of our text, the perpetual work of the abiding Lord.

'He whom God raised up saw no corruption.' It is a fact that there are thousands of men and women in the world to-day who have a feeling about that nineteen-centuries-dead Galilean carpenter's son that they have about no one else. All the great names of antiquity are but ghosts and shadows, and all the names in the Church and in the world, of men whom we have not seen, are dim and ineffectual to us. They may evoke our admiration, our reverence, and our wonder, but none of them can touch our hearts. But here is this unique, anomalous fact that men and women by the thousand love Jesus Christ, the dead One, the unseen One, far away back there in the ages, and feel that there is no mist of oblivion between them and Him.

That is because He does for you and me what none of these other men can do. Luther preached about the Cross; Christ *died* on it. 'Was Paul crucified for you?' there is the secret of His undying hold upon the world. The further secret lies in this, that He is not a past force but a present one. He is no exhausted power but a power mighty to-day; working in us, around us, on us, and for us—a living Christ. 'This Man whom God raised up from the dead saw no corruption,' the others move away from us like figures in a fog, dim as they

pass into the mists, having a blurred half-spectral outline for a moment, and then gone.

Christ's death has a present and a perpetual power. He has 'offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and no time can diminish the efficacy of His Cross, nor our need of it, nor the full tide of blessings which flow from it to the believing soul. Therefore do men cling to Him to-day as if it was but yesterday that He had died for them. When all other names carved on the world's records have become unreadable, like forgotten inscriptions on decaying grave-stones, His shall endure for ever, deep graven on the fleshly tables of the heart. His revelation of God is the highest truth. Till the end of time men will turn to His life for their clearest knowledge and happiest certainty of their Father in heaven. There is nothing limited or local in His character or works. In His meek beauty and gentle perfectness, He stands so high above us all that, to-day, the inspiration of His example and the lessons of His conduct touch us as much as if He had lived in this generation, and will always shine before men as their best and most blessed law of conduct. Christ will not be antiquated till He is outgrown, and it will be some time before that happens.

But Christ's power is not only the abiding influence of His earthly life and death. He is not a past force, but a present one. He is putting forth fresh energies to-day, working in and for and by all who love Him. We believe in a living Christ.

Therefore the final thought, in all our grateful commemoration of dead helpers and guides, should be of the undying Lord. He sent whatsoever power was in them. He is with His Church to-day, still giving to men the gifts needful for their times. Aaron may die

on Hor, and Moses be laid in his unknown grave on Pisgah, but the Angel of the Covenant, who is the true Leader, abides in the pillar of cloud and fire, Israel's guide in the march, and covering shelter in repose. That is our consolation in our personal losses when our dear ones are 'not suffered to continue by reason of death.' He who gave them all their sweetness is with us still, and has all the sweetness which He lent them for a time. So if we have Christ with us we cannot be desolate. Looking on all the men, who in their turn have helped forward His cause a little way, we should let their departure teach us His presence, their limitations His all-sufficiency, their death His life.

Luther was once found, at a moment of peril and fear, when he had need to grasp unseen strength, sitting in an abstracted mood, tracing on the table with his finger the words '*Vivit! vivit!*'—'He lives! He lives!' It is our hope for ourselves, and for God's truth, and for mankind. Men come and go; leaders, teachers, thinkers speak and work for a season and then fall silent and impotent. He abides. They die, but He lives. They are lights kindled, and therefore sooner or later quenched, but He is the true light from which they draw all their brightness, and He shines for evermore. Other men are left behind and, as the world glides forward, are wrapped in ever-thickening folds of oblivion, through which they shine feebly for a little while, like lamps in a fog, and then are muffled in invisibility. We honour other names, and the coming generations will forget them, but 'His name shall endure for ever, His name shall continue as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed.'

JEWISH REJECTERS AND GENTILE RECEIVERS

'And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. 46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. 48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord : and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

'And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4. But the multitude of the city was divided : and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles. 5. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, 6. They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7. And there they preached the Gospel.'

—ACTS xiii. 44-52; xiv. 1-7.

IN general outline, the course of events in the two great cities of Asia Minor, with which the present passage is concerned, was the same. It was only too faithful a forecast of what was to be Paul's experience everywhere. The stages are: preaching in the synagogue, rejection there, appeal to the Gentiles, reception by them, a little nucleus of believers formed ; disturbances fomented by the Jews, who swallow their hatred of Gentiles by reason of their greater hatred of the Apostles, and will riot with heathens, though they will not pray nor eat with them ; and finally the Apostles' departure to carry the gospel farther afield. This being the outline, we have mainly to consider any special features diversifying it in each case.

Their experience in Antioch was important, because it forced Paul and Barnabas to put into plain words, making very clear to themselves as well as to their hearers, the law of their future conduct. It is always a step in advance when circumstances oblige us to formalise our method of action. Words have a wonderful power in clearing up our own vision. Paul and Barnabas had known all along that they were sent to the Gentiles; but a conviction in the mind is one thing, and the same conviction driven in on us by facts is quite another. The discipline of Antioch crystallised floating intentions into a clear statement, which henceforth became the rule of Paul's conduct. Well for us if we have open eyes to discern the meaning of difficulties, and promptitude and decision to fix and speak out plainly the course which they prescribe!

The miserable motives of the Jews' antagonism are forcibly stated in vs. 44, 45. They did not 'contradict and blaspheme,' because they had taken a week to think over the preaching and had seen its falseness, but simply because, dog-in-the-manger like, they could not bear that 'the whole city' should be welcome to share the message. No doubt there was a crowd of 'Gentile dogs' thronging the approach to the synagogue; and one can almost see the scowling faces and hear the rustle of the robes drawn closer to avoid pollution. Who were these wandering strangers that they should gather such a crowd? And what had the uncircumcised rabble of Antioch to do with 'the promises made to the fathers'? It is not the only time that religious men have taken offence at crowds gathering to hear God's word. Let us take care that we do not repeat the sin. There are always some who—

'Taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness.'

It needed some courage to front the wild excitement of such a mob, with calm, strong words likely to increase the rage.

'Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' This is not to be regarded as announcing a general course of action, but simply as applying to the actual rejecters in Antioch. The necessity that the word should first be spoken to the Jews continued to be recognised, in each new sphere of work, by the Apostle; but wherever, as here, men turned from the message, the messengers turned from them without further waste of time. Paul put into words here the law for his whole career. The fit punishment of rejection is the withdrawal of the offer. There is something pathetic in the persistence with which, in place after place, Paul goes through the same sequence, his heart yearning over his brethren according to the flesh, and hoping on, after all repulses. It was far more than natural patriotism; it was an offshoot of Christ's own patient love.

Note also the divine command. Paul bases his action on a prophecy as to the Messiah. But the relation on which prophecy insists between the personal servant of Jehovah and the collective Israel, is such that the great office of being the Light of the world devolves from Him on it and the true Israel is to be a light to the Gentiles. These very Jews in Antioch, lashing themselves into fury because Gentiles were to be offered a share in Israel's blessings, ought to have been discharging this glorious function. Their failure showed that they were no parts of the real Israel. No doubt the two missionaries left the syna-

gogue as they spoke, and, as the door swung behind them, it shut hope out and unbelief in. The air was fresh outside, and eager hearts welcomed the word. Very beautifully is the gladness of the Gentile hearers set in contrast with the temper of the Jews. It is strange news to heathen hearts that there is a God who loves them, and a divine Christ who has died for them. The experience of many a missionary follows Paul's here.

'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' The din of many a theological battle has raged round these words, the writer of which would have probably needed a good deal of instruction before he could have been made to understand what the fighting was about. But it is to be noted that there is evidently intended a contrast between the envious Jews and the gladly receptive Gentiles, which is made more obvious by the repetition of the words 'eternal life.' It would seem much more relevant and accordant with the context to understand the word rendered 'ordained' as meaning 'adapted' or 'fitted,' than to find in it a reference to divine foreordination. Such a meaning is legitimate, and strongly suggested by the context. The reference then would be to the 'frame of mind of the heathen, and not to the decrees of God.'

The only points needing notice in the further developments at Antioch are the agents employed by the Jews, the conduct of the Apostles, and the sweet little picture of the converts. As to the former, piously inclined women in a heathen city would be strongly attracted by Judaism and easily lend themselves to the impressions of their teachers. We know that many women of rank were at that period powerfully affected in this manner; and if a Rabbi could move a Gentile of in-

fluence through whispers to the Gentile's wife, he would not be slow to do it. The ease with which the Jews stirred up tumults everywhere against the Apostle indicates their possession of great influence; and their willingness to be hand in glove with heathen for so laudable an object as crushing one of their own people who had become a heretic, measures the venom of their hate and the depth of their unscrupulousness.

The Apostles had not to fear violence, as their enemies were content with turning them out of Antioch and its neighbourhood; but they obeyed Christ's command, shaking off the dust against them, in token of renouncing all connection. The significant act is a trace of early knowledge of Christ's words, long before the date of our Gospels.

While the preachers had to leave the little flock in the midst of wolves, there was peace in the fold. Like the Ethiopian courtier when deprived of Philip, the new believers at Antioch found that the withdrawal of the earthly brought the heavenly Guide. 'They were filled with joy.' What! left ignorant, lonely, ringed about with enemies, how could they be glad? Because they were filled 'with the Holy Ghost.' Surely joy in such circumstances was no less supernatural a token of His presence than rushing wind or parting flames or lips opened to speak with tongues. God makes us lonely that He may Himself be our Companion.

It was a long journey to the great city of Iconium. According to some geographers, the way led over savage mountains; but the two brethren tramped along, with an unseen Third between them, and that Presence made the road light. They had little to cheer them in their prospects, if they looked with the eye of sense; but they were in good heart, and the remem-

brance of Antioch did not embitter or discourage them. Straight to the synagogue, as before, they went. It was their best introduction to the new field. There, if we take the plain words of Acts xiv. 1, they found a new thing, ‘Greeks,’ heathens pure and simple, not Hellenists or Greek-speaking Jews, nor even proselytes, in the synagogue. This has seemed so singular that efforts have been made to impose another sense on the words, or to suppose that the notice of Greeks, as well as Jews, believing is loosely appended to the statement of the preaching in the synagogue, omitting notice of wider evangelising. But it is better to accept than to correct our narrative, as we know nothing of the circumstances that may have led to this presence of Greeks in the synagogue. Some modern setters of the Bible writers right would be all the better for remembering occasionally that improbable things have a strange knack of happening.

The usual results followed the preaching of the Gospel. The Jews were again the mischief-makers, and, with the astuteness of their race, pushed the Gentiles to the front, and this time tried a new piece of annoyance. ‘The brethren’ bore the brunt of the attack; that is, the converts, not Paul and Barnabas. It was a cunning move to drop suspicions into the minds of influential townsmen, and so to harass, not the two strangers, but their adherents. The calculation was that that would stop the progress of the heresy by making its adherents uncomfortable, and would also wound the teachers through their disciples.

But one small element had been left out of the calculation — the sort of men these teachers were; and another factor which had not hitherto appeared came into play, and upset the whole scheme. Paul and

Barnabas knew when to retreat and when to stand their ground. This time they stood; and the opposition launched at their friends was the reason why they did so. ‘Long time *therefore* abode they.’ If their own safety had been in question, they might have fled; but they could not leave the men whose acceptance of their message had brought them into straits. But behind the two bold speakers stood ‘the Lord,’ Christ Himself, the true Worker. Men who live in Him are made bold by their communion with Him, and He witnesses for those who witness for Him.

Note the designation of the Gospel as ‘the word of His grace.’ It has for its great theme the condescending, giving love of Jesus. Its subject is grace; its origin is grace; its gift is grace. Observe, too, that the same connection between boldness of speech and signs and wonders is found in Acts iv. 29, 30. Courageous speech for Christ is ever attended by tokens of His power, and the accompanying tokens of His power make the speech more courageous.

The normal course of events was pursued. Faithful preaching provoked hostility, which led to the alliance of discordant elements, fused for a moment by a common hatred—alas! that enmity to God’s truth should be often a more potent bond of union than love!—and then to a wise withdrawal from danger. Sometimes it is needful to fling away life for Jesus; but if it can be preserved without shirking duty, it is better to flee than to die. An unnecessary martyr is a suicide. The Christian readiness to be offered has nothing in common with fanatical carelessness of life, and still less with the morbid longing for martyrdom which disfigures some of the most pathetic pages of the Church’s history. Paul living to preach in the regions beyond

was more useful than Paul dead in a street riot in Iconium. A heroic prudence should ever accompany a trustful daring, and both are best learned in communion with Jesus.

UNWORTHY OF LIFE

'... Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.'—Acts xiii. 46.

So ended the first attempt on Paul's great missionary journey to preach to the Jews. It is described at great length and the sermon given in full because it is the first. A wonderful sermon it was; touching all keys of feeling, now pleading almost with tears, now flashing with indignation, now calmly dealing with Scripture prophecies, now glowing as it tells the story of Christ's death for men. It melted some of the hearers, but the most were wrought up to furious passion—and with characteristic vehemence, like their ancestors and their descendants through long dreary generations, fell to 'contradicting and blaspheming.' We can see the scene in the synagogue, the eager faces, the vehement gestures, the hubbub of tongues, the bitter words that stormed round the two in the midst, Barnabas like Jupiter, grave, majestic, and venerable; Paul like Mercury, agile, mobile, swift of speech. They bore the brunt of the fury till they saw it to be hopeless to try to calm it, and then departed with these remarkable words.

They are even more striking if we notice that 'judge' here may be used in its full legal sense. It is not merely equivalent to *consider*, for these Jews by no means

thought themselves unworthy of eternal life, but it means, 'ye adjudge and pass sentence on yourselves to be.' Their rejection of the message was a self-pronounced sentence. It proved them to be, and made them, 'unworthy of eternal life.' There are two or three very striking thoughts to be gathered from these words which I would dwell on now.

I. What constitutes worthiness and unworthiness.

There are two meanings to the word 'worthy'—deserving or fit. They run into each other and yet they may be kept quite apart. For instance you may say of a man that 'he is worthy' to be something or other, for which he is obviously qualified, not thinking at all whether he deserves it or not.

Now in the first of these senses—we are all unworthy of eternal life. That is just to state in other words the tragic truth of universal sinfulness. The natural outcome and issue of the course which all men follow is death. But yet there are men who are fit for and capable of eternal life. Who they are and what fitness is can only be ascertained when we rightly understand what eternal life is. It is not merely future blessedness or a synonym for a vulgar heaven. That is the common notion of its meaning. Men think of that future as a blessed state to which God can admit anybody if He will, and, as He is good, will admit pretty nearly everybody. But eternal life is a present possession as well as a future one, and passing by its deeper aspects, it includes—

Deliverance from evil habits and desires.

Purity, and love of all good and fair things.

Communion with God.

As well as forgiveness and removal of punishment.

What then are the qualifications making a man worthy of, in the sense of fit for, such a state?

(a) To know oneself to be unworthy.

He who judges himself to be worthy is unworthy. He who knows himself to be unworthy is worthy.

The first requisite is consciousness of sin, leading to repentance.

(b) To abandon striving to make oneself worthy.

By ourselves we never can do so. Many of us think that we must do our best, and then God will do the rest.

There must be the entire cessation of all attempt to work out by our own efforts characters that would entitle us to eternal life.

(c) To be willing to accept life on God's terms.

As a mere gift.

(d) To desire it.

God cannot give it to any one who does not want it. He cannot force His gifts on us.

This then is the worthiness.

II. How we pass sentence on ourselves as unworthy.

It is quite clear that 'judge' here does not mean consider, for a sense of unworthiness is not the reason which keeps men away from the Gospel. Rather, as we have seen, a proud belief in our worthiness keeps very many away. But 'judge' here means 'adjudicate' or 'pronounce sentence on,' and worthy means fit, qualified.

Consider then—

(a) That our attitude to the Gospel is a revelation of our deepest selves.

The Gospel is a 'discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart.' It judges us here and now, and by their attitude to it 'the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed.'

(b) That our rejection of it plainly shows that we have not the qualifications for eternal life.

No doubt some men are kept from accepting Christ by intellectual doubts and difficulties, but even these would alter their whole attitude to Him if they had a profound consciousness of sin, and a desire for deliverance from it.

But with regard to the great bulk of its hearers, no doubt the hindrance is chiefly moral. Many causes may combine to produce the absence of qualification. The excuses in the parable—farm, oxen, wife—all amount to engrossment with this present world, and such absorption in the things seen and temporal deadens desire. So the Gospel preached excites no longings, and a man hears the offer of salvation without one motion of his heart towards it, and thus proclaims himself ‘unworthy of eternal life.’

But the great disqualification is the absence of all consciousness of sin. This is the very deepest reason which keeps men away from Christ.

How solemn a thing the preaching and hearing of this word is!

How possible for you to make yourselves fit!

How simple the qualification! We have but to know ourselves sinners and to trust Jesus and then we ‘shall be counted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead.’ Then we shall be ‘worthy to escape and to stand before the Son of Man.’ Then shall we be ‘worthy of this calling,’ and the Judge himself shall say: ‘They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.’

'FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST'

'And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.'—ACTS iii. 52.

THAT joy was as strange as a garden full of flowers would be in bitter winter weather. For everything in the circumstances of these disciples tended to make them sad. They had been but just won from heathenism, and they were raw, ignorant, unfit to stand alone. Paul and Barnabas, their only guides, had been hunted out of Antioch by a mob, and it would have been no wonder if these disciples had felt as if they had been taken on to the ice and then left, when they most needed a hand to steady them. Luke emphasises the contrast between what might have been expected, and what was actually the case, by that eloquent 'and' at the beginning of our verse, which links together the departure of the Apostles and the joy of the disciples. But the next words explain the paradox. These new converts, left in a great heathen city, with no helpers, no guides, to work out as best they might a faith of which they had but newly received the barest rudiments, were 'full of joy' because they were 'full of the Holy Ghost.'

Now that latter phrase, so striking here, is characteristic of this book of the Acts, and especially of its earlier chapters, which are all, as it were, throbbing with wonder at the new gift which Pentecost had brought. Let me for a moment, in the briefest possible fashion, try to recall to you the instances of its occurrence, for they are very significant and very important.

You remember how at Pentecost 'all' the disciples

were ‘filled with the Holy Ghost.’ Then when the first persecution broke over the Church, Peter before the Council is ‘filled with the Holy Spirit,’ and therefore he beards them, and ‘speaks with all boldness.’ When he goes back to the Church and tells them of the threatening cloud that was hanging over them, they too are filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore rise buoyantly upon the tossing wave, as a ship might do when it passes the bar and meets the heaving sea. Then again the Apostles lay down the qualifications for election to the so-called office of deacon as being that the men should be ‘full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom’; and in accordance therewith, we read of the first of the seven, Stephen, that he was ‘full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,’ and therefore ‘full of grace and power.’ When he stood before the Council he was ‘full of the Holy Ghost,’ and therefore looked up into heaven and saw it opened, and the Christ standing ready to help him. In like manner we read of Barnabas that he ‘was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.’ And finally we read in our text that these new converts, left alone in Antioch of Pisidia, were ‘full of joy and of the Holy Ghost.’

Now these are the principal instances, and my purpose now is rather to deal with the whole of these instances of the occurrence of this remarkable expression than with the one which I have selected as a text, because I think that they teach us great truths bearing very closely on the strength and joyfulness of the Christian life which are far too much neglected, obscured, and forgotten by us to-day.

I wish then to point you, first, to the solemn thought that is here, as to what should be—

I. The experience of every Christian.

Note the two things, the universality and the abundance of this divine gift. I have often had occasion to say to you, and so I merely repeat it again in the briefest fashion, that we do not grasp the central blessedness of the Christian faith unless, beyond forgiveness and acceptance, beyond the mere putting away of the dread of punishment either here or hereafter, we see that the gift of God in Jesus Christ is the communication to every believing soul of that divine life which is bestowed by the Spirit of Christ granted to every believing heart. But I would have you notice how the universality of the gift is unmistakably taught us by the instances which I have briefly gathered together in my previous remarks. It was no official class on which, on the day of Pentecost, the tongues of fire fluttered down. It was to the whole Church that courage to front the persecutor was imparted. When in Samaria the preaching of Philip brought about the result of the communication of the Holy Spirit, it was to all the believers that it was granted, and when, in the Roman barracks at Cæsarea, Cornelius and his companion listened to Peter, it was upon them all that that Divine Spirit descended.

I suppose I need not remind you of how, if we pass beyond this book of the Acts into the Epistles of Paul, his affirmations do most emphatically insist upon the fact that 'we are all made to drink into one Spirit'; and so convinced is he of the universality of the possession of that divine life by every Christian, that he does not hesitate to say that 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His,' and to clear away all possibility of misunderstanding the depth and wonderfulness of the gift, he further adds in another

place, ‘Know ye not that the Spirit is *in* you, except ye be reprobates?’ Similarly another of the New Testament writers declares, in the broadest terms, that ‘this spake he of the Holy Spirit, which’—Apostles? no; office-bearers? no; ordained men? no; distinguished and leading men? No—‘*they that believe on Him* should receive.’ Christianity is the true democracy, because it declares that upon all, handmaidens and servants, young men and old men, there comes the divine gift. The world thinks of a divine inspiration in a more or less superficial fashion, as touching only the lofty summits, the great thinkers and teachers and artists and mighty men of light and leading of the race. The Old Testament regarded prophets and kings, and those who were designated to important offices, as the possessors of the Divine Spirit. But Christianity has seen the sun rising so high in the heavens that the humblest floweret, in the deepest valley, basks in its beams and opens to its light. ‘We have *all* been made to drink into the one Spirit.’

Let me remind you too of how, from the usage of this book, as well as from the rest of the New Testament teaching, there rises the other thought of the abundance of the gift. ‘Full of the Holy Spirit’—the cup is brimming with generous wine. Not that that fulness is such as to make inconsistencies impossible, as, alas, the best of us know. The highest condition for us is laid down in the sad words which yet have triumph in their sadness—‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.’ But whilst the fulness is not such as to exclude the need of conflict, it is such as to bring the certainty of victory.

Again if we turn to the instances to which I have

already referred, we shall find that they fall into two classes, which are distinguished in the original by a slight variation in the form of the words employed. Some instances refer to a habitual possession of an abundant spiritual life moulding the character constantly, as in the cases of Stephen and Barnabas. Others refer rather to occasional and special influxes of special power on account of special circumstances, and drawn forth by special exigencies, as when there poured into Peter's heart the Divine Spirit that made him bold before the Council; or as when the dying martyr's spirit was flooded with a new clearness of vision that pierced the heavens and beheld the Christ. So then there may be and ought to be, in each of us, a fulness of the Spirit, up to the edge of our capacity, and yet of such a kind as that it may be reinforced and increased when special needs arise.

Not only so, but that which fills me to-day should not fill me to-morrow, because, as in earthly love, so in heavenly, no man can tell to what this thing shall grow. The more of fruition the more there will be of expansion, and the more of expansion the more of desire, and the more of desire the more of capacity, and the more of capacity the more of possession. So, brethren, the man who receives a spark of the divine life, through his most rudimentary and tremulous faith, if he is a faithful steward of the gift that is given to him, will find that it grows and grows, and that there is no limit to its growth, and that in its limitless growth there lies the surest prophecy of an eternal growth in the heavens.

A universal gift, that is to say, a gift to each of us if we are Christians, an abundant gift that fills the whole nature of a man, according to the measure of

his present power to receive—that is the ideal, that is what God means, that is what these first believers had. It did not make them perfect, it did not save them from faults or from errors, but it was real, it was influential, it was moulding their characters, it was progressive. And that is the ideal for all Christians. Is it our actual? We are meant to be full of the Holy Ghost. Ah! how many of us have never realised that there is such a thing as being thus possessed with a divine life, partly because we do not understand that such a fulness will not be distinguishable from our own self, except by bettering of the works of self, and partly because of other reasons which I shall have to touch upon presently! Brethren, we may, every one of us, be filled with the Spirit. Let each of us ask, ‘Am I? and if I am not, why this emptiness in the presence of such abundance?’

And now let me ask you to look, in the second place, at what we gather from these instances as to—

II. The results of that universal, abundant life.

Do not let us run away with the idea that the New Testament, or any part of it, regards miracles and tongues and the like as being the normal and chiefest gifts of that Divine Spirit. People read this book of the Acts of the Apostles and, averse from the supernatural, exaggerate the extent to which the primitive gift of the Holy Spirit was manifested by signs and wonders, tongues of fire, and so on. We have only to look at the instances to which I have already referred to see that far more lofty and far more conspicuous than any such external and transient manifestations, which yet have their place, are the permanent and inward results, moulding character, and making men. And Paul’s

First Epistle to the Corinthians goes as far in the way of setting the moral and spiritual effects of the divine influence above the merely miraculous and external ones, as the most advanced opponent of the supernatural could desire.

Let us look, and it can only be briefly, at the various results which are presented in the instances to which I have referred. The most general expression for all, which is the result of the Divine Spirit dwelling in a man, is that it makes him good. Look at one of the instances to which we have referred. ‘Barnabas was a good man’—was he? How came he to be so? Because he was ‘full of the Holy Ghost.’ And how came he to be ‘full of the Holy Ghost’? Because he was ‘full of faith.’ Get the divine life into you, and that will make you good; and, brethren, nothing else will. It is like the bottom heat in a green-house, which makes all the plants that are there, whatever their orders, grow and blossom and be healthy and strong. Therein is the difference between Christian morality and the world’s ethics. They may not differ much, they do in some respects, in their ideal of what constitutes goodness, but they differ in this, that the one says, ‘Be good, be good, be good!’ but, like the Pharisees of old, puts out not a finger to help a man to bear the burdens that it lays upon him. The other says, ‘Be good,’ but it also says, ‘take this and it will make you good.’ And so the one is Gospel and the other is talk, the one is a word of good tidings, and the other is a beautiful speculation, or a crushing commandment that brings death rather than life. ‘If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law.’ But since the clearest laying down of duty brings us no nearer to the performance of duty, we need and,

thank God! we have, a gift bestowed which invests with power. He in whom the ‘Spirit of Holiness’ dwells, and he alone, will be holy. The result of the life of God in the heart is a life growingly like God’s, manifested in the world.

Then again let me remind you of how, from another of our instances, there comes another thought. The result of this majestic, supernatural, universal, abundant, divine life is practical sagacity in the commonest affairs of life. ‘Look ye out from among you seven men, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.’ What to do? To meet wisely the claims of suspicious and jealous poverty, and to distribute fairly a little money. That was all. And are you going to invoke such a lofty gift as this, to do nothing grander than that? Yes. Gravitation holds planets in their orbits, and keeps grains of dust in their places. And one result of the inspiration of the Almighty, which is granted to Christian people, is that they will be wise for the little affairs of life. But Stephen was also ‘full of grace and power,’ two things that do not often go together—grace, gentleness, loveliness, graciousness, on the one side, and strength on the other, which divorced, make wild work of character, and which united, make men like God. So if we desire our lives to be full of sweetness and light and beauty, the best way is to get the life of Christ into them; and if we desire our lives not to be made placid and effeminate by our cult of graciousness and gracefulness, but to have their beauty stiffened and strengthened by manly energy, then the best way is to get the life of the ‘strong Son of God, immortal love,’ into our lives.

The same Stephen, ‘full of the Holy Ghost,’ looked up into heaven and saw the Christ. So one result of

that abundant life, if we have it, will be that even though as with him, when he saw the heavens opened, there may be some smoke-darkened roof above our heads, we can look through all the shows of this vain world, and our purged eyes can behold the Christ. Again the disciples in our text 'were full of joy,' because 'they were full of the Holy Spirit,' and we, if we have that abundant life within us, shall not be dependent for our gladness on the outer world, but like explorers in the Arctic regions, even if we have to build a hut of snow, shall be warm within it when the thermometer is far below zero; and there will be light there when the long midnight is spread around the dwelling. So, dear friends, let us understand what is the main thing for a Christian to endeavour after,—not so much the cultivation of special graces as the deepening of the life of Christ in the spirit.

We gather from some of these instances—

III. The way by which we may be thus filled.

We read that Stephen was 'full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,' and that Barnabas was 'full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' and it is quite clear from the respective contexts that, though the order in which these fulnesses are placed is different in the two clauses, their relation to each other is the same. Faith is the condition of possessing the Spirit. And what do we mean in this connection by faith? I mean, first, a belief in the truth of the possible abiding of the divine Spirit in our spirits, a truth which the superficial Christianity of this generation sorely needs to have forced upon its consciousness far more than it has it. I mean aspiration and desire after; I mean confident expectation of. Your wish measures your possession. You have as much of God as you desire. If you have no

more, it is because you do not desire any more. The Christian people of to-day, many of whom are so empty of God, are in a very tragic sense, 'full,' because they have as much as they can take in. If you bring a tiny cup, and do not much care whether anything pours into it or not, you will get it filled, but you might have had a gallon vessel filled if you had chosen to bring it. Of course there are other conditions too. We have to use the life that is given us. We have to see that we do not quench it by sin, which drives the dove of God from a man's heart. But the great truth is that if I open the door of my heart by faith, Christ will come in, in His Spirit. If I take away the blinds the light will shine into the chamber. If I lift the sluice the water will pour in to drive my mill. If I deepen the channels, more of the water of life can flow into them, and the deeper I make them the fuller they will be.

Brethren, we have wasted much time and effort in trying to mend our characters. Let us try to get that into them which will mend them. And let us remember that, if we are full of faith, we shall be full of the Holy Spirit, and therefore full of wisdom, full of grace and power, full of goodness, full of joy, whatever our circumstances. And when death comes, though it may be in some cruel form, we shall be able to look up and see the opened heavens and the welcoming Christ.

DEIFIED AND STONED

'And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. 13. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of,

they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. 19. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.'—ACTS xiv. 11-22.

THE scene at Lystra offers a striking instance of the impossibility of eliminating the miraculous element from this book. The cure of a lame man is the starting-point of the whole story. Without it the rest is motiveless and inexplicable. There can be no explosion without a train and a fuse. The miracle, and the miracle only, supplies these. We may choose between believing and disbelieving it, but the rejection of the supernatural does not make this book easier to accept, but utterly chaotic.

I. We have, first, the burst of excited wonder which floods the crowd with the conviction that the two Apostles are incarnations of deities. It is difficult to grasp the indications of locality in the story, but probably the miracle was wrought in some crowded place, perhaps the forum. At all events, it was in full view of 'the multitudes,' and they were mostly of the lower orders, as their speaking in 'the speech of Lycaonia' suggests.

This half-barbarous crowd had the ancient faith in the gods unweakened, and the legends, which had become dim to pure Greek and Roman, some of which had originated in their immediate neighbourhood, still found full credence among them. A Jew's first

thought on seeing a miracle was, 'by the prince of the devils'; an average Greek's or Roman's was 'sorcery'; these simple people's, like many barbarous tribes to which white men have gone with the marvels of modern science, was 'the gods have come down'; our modern superior person's, on reading of one, is 'hallucination,' or 'a mistake of an excited imagination.' Perhaps the cry of the multitudes at Lystra gets nearer the heart of the thing than those others. For the miracle is a witness of present divine power, and though the worker of it is not an incarnation of divinity, 'God *is* with him.'

But that joyful conviction, which shot through the crowd, reveals how deep lies the longing for the manifestation of divinity in the form of humanity, and how natural it is to believe that, if there is a divine being, he is sure to draw near to us poor men, and that in our own likeness. Then is the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation but one more of the many reachings out of the heart to paint a fair picture of the fulfilment of its longings? Well, since it is the only such that is alleged to have taken place in historic times, and the only one that comes with any body of historic evidence, and the only one that brings with it transforming power, and since to believe in a God, and also to believe that He has never broken the awful silence, nor done anything to fulfil a craving which He has set in men's hearts, is absurd, it is reasonable to answer, No. 'The gods are come down in the likeness of men' is a wistful confession of need, and a dim hope of its supply. 'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' is the supply.

Barnabas was the older man, and his very silence suggested his superior dignity. So he was taken for

Jupiter (Zeus in the Greek), and the younger man for his inferior, Mercury (Hermes in the Greek), ‘the messenger of the gods.’ Clearly the two missionaries did not understand what the multitudes were shouting in their ‘barbarous’ language, or they would have intervened. Perhaps they had left the spot before the excitement rose to its height, for they knew nothing of the preparations for the sacrifice till they ‘*heard of*’ it, and then they ‘sprang forth,’ which implies that they were within some place, possibly their lodging.

If we could be sure what ‘gates’ are meant in verse 13, the course of events would be plainer. Were they those of the city, in which case the priest and procession would be coming from the temple outside the walls? or those of the temple itself? or those of the Apostles’ lodging? Opinions differ, and the material for deciding is lacking. At all events, whether from sharing in the crowd’s enthusiasm, or with an eye to the reputation of his shrine, the priest hurriedly procured oxen for a sacrifice, which one reading of the text specifies as an ‘additional’ offering—that is, over and above the statutory sacrifices. Is it a sign of haste that the ‘garlands,’ which should have been twined round the oxen’s horns, are mentioned separately? If so, we get a lively picture of the exultant hurry of the crowd.

II. The Apostles are as deeply moved as the multitude is, but by what different emotions! The horror of idolatry, which was their inheritance from a hundred generations, flamed up at the thought of themselves being made objects of worship. They had met many different sorts of receptions on this journey, but never before anything like this. Opposition and threats left them calm, but this stirred them to the

depths. ‘Scoff at us, fight with us, maltreat us, and we will endure; but do not make gods of us.’ I do not know that their ‘successors’ have always felt exactly so.

In verse 14 Barnabas is named first, contrary to the order prevailing since Paphos, the reason being that the crowd thought him the superior. The remonstrance ascribed to both, but no doubt spoken by Paul, contains nothing that any earnest monotheist, Jew or Gentile philosopher, might not have said. The purpose of it was not to preach Christ, but to stop the sacrifice. It is simply a vehemently earnest protest against idolatry, and a proclamation of one living God. The comparison with the speech in Athens is interesting, as showing Paul’s exquisite felicity in adapting his style to his audience. There is nothing to the peasants of Lycaonia about poets, no argumentation about the degradation of the idea of divinity by taking images as its likeness, no wide view of the course of history, no glimpse of the mystic thought that all creatures live and move in Him. All that might suit the delicate ears of Athenians, but would have been wasted in Lystra amidst the tumultuous crowd. But we have instead of these the fearless assertion, flung in the face of the priest of Jupiter, that idols are ‘vanities,’ as Paul had learned from Isaiah and Jeremiah; the plain declaration of the one God, ‘living,’ and not like these inanimate images; of His universal creative power; and the earnest exhortation to turn to Him.

In verse 16 Paul meets an objection which rises in his mind as likely to be springing in his hearers’: ‘If there is such a God, why have we never heard of Him till now?’ That is quite in Paul’s manner. The answer is undeveloped, as compared with the Athenian

address or with Romans i. But there is couched in verse 16 a tacit contrast between ‘the generations gone by’ and the present, which is drawn out in the speech on Mars Hill: ‘but *now* commandeth all men every-where to repent,’ and also a contrast between the ‘nations’ left to walk in their own ways, and Israel to whom revelation had been made. The place and the temper of the listeners did not admit of enlarging on such matters.

But there was a plain fact, which was level to every peasant’s apprehension, and might strike home to the rustic crowd. God *had* left ‘the nations to walk in their own ways,’ and yet not altogether. That thought is wrought out in Romans i., and the difference between its development there and here is instructive. Beneficence is the sign-manual of heaven. The orderly sequence of the seasons, the rain from heaven, the seat of the gods from which the two Apostles were thought to have come down, the yearly miracle of harvest, and the gladness that it brings—all these are witnesses to a living Person moving the processes of the universe towards a beneficent end for man.

In spite of all modern impugners, it still remains true that the phenomena of ‘nature,’ their continuity, their co-operation, and their beneficent issues, demand the recognition of a Person with a loving purpose moving them all. ‘*Thou* crownest the year with Thy goodness; and *Thy* paths drop fatness.’

III. The malice of the Jews of Antioch is remarkable. Not content with hounding the Apostles from that city, they came raging after them to Lystra, where there does not appear to have been a synagogue, since we hear only of their stirring up the ‘multitudes.’ The mantle of Saul had fallen on them,

and they were now ‘persecuting’ him ‘even unto strange cities.’

No note is given of the time between the attempted sacrifice and the accomplished stoning, but probably some space intervened. Persuading the multitudes, however fickle they were, would take some time; and indeed one ancient text of Acts has an expansion of the verse: ‘They persuaded the multitudes to depart from them [the Apostles], saying that they spake nothing true, but lied in everything.’

No doubt some time elapsed, but few emotions are more transient than such impure religious excitement as the crowd had felt, and the ebb is as great as the flood, and the oozy bottom laid bare is foul. Popular favourites in other departments have to experience the same fate—one day, ‘roses, roses, all the way’; the next, rotten eggs and curses. Other folks than the ignorant peasants at Lystra have had devout emotion surging over them and leaving them dry.

Who are ‘they’ who stoned Paul? Grammatically, the Jews, and probably it was so. They hated him so much that they themselves began the stoning; but no doubt the mob, which is always cruel, because it needs strong excitement, lent willing hands. Did Paul remember Stephen, as the stones came whizzing on him? It is an added touch of brutality that they dragged the supposed corpse out of the city, with no gentle hands, we may be sure. Perhaps it was flung down near the very temple ‘before the city,’ where the priest that wanted to sacrifice was on duty.

The crowd, having wreaked their vengeance, melted away, but a handful of brave disciples remained, standing round the bruised, unconscious form, ready to lay it tenderly in some hastily dug grave. No

previous mention of disciples has been made. The narrative of Acts does not profess to be complete, and the argument from its silence is precarious.

Luke shows no disposition to easy belief in miracles. He does not know that Paul was dead; his medical skill familiarised him with protracted states of unconsciousness; so all he vouches for is that Paul lay as if dead on some rubbish heap ‘without the camp,’ and that, with courage and persistence which were supernatural, whether his reviving was so or not, the man thus sorely battered went back to the city, and next day went on with his work, as if stoning was a trifle not to be taken account of.

The Apostles turned at Derbe, and coming back on their outward route, reached Antioch, encouraging the new disciples, who had now to be left truly like sheepless sheep among wolves. They did not encourage them by making light of the dangers waiting them, but they plainly set before them the law of the Kingdom, which they had seen exemplified in Paul, that we must suffer if we would reign with the King. That ‘we’ in verse 22 is evidently quoted from Paul, and touchingly shows how he pointed to his own stoning as what they too must be prepared to suffer. It is a thought frequently recurring in his letters. It remains true in all ages, though the manner of suffering varies.

DREAM AND REALITY

‘The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.’—*Acts xiv. 11.*

THIS was the spontaneous instinctive utterance of simple villagers when they saw a deed of power and

kindness. Many an English traveller and settler among rude people has been similarly honoured. And in Lycaonia the Apostles were close upon places that were celebrated in Greek mythology as having witnessed the very two gods, here spoken of, wandering among the shepherds and entertained with modest hospitality in their huts.

The incident is a very striking and picturesque one. The shepherd people standing round, the sudden flash of awe and yet of gladness which ran through them, the tumultuous outcry, which, being in their rude dialect, was unintelligible to the Apostles till it was interpreted by the appearance of the priest of Jupiter with oxen and garlands for offerings, the glimpse of the two Apostles—the older, graver, venerable Barnabas, the younger, more active, ready-tongued Paul, whom their imaginations converted into the Father of gods and men, and the herald Mercury, who were already associated in local legends; the priest, eager to gain credit for his temple ‘before the city,’ the lowing oxen, and the vehement appeal of the Apostles, make a picture which is more vividly presented in the simple narrative than even in the cartoon of the great painter whom the narrative has inspired.

But we have not to deal with the picturesque element alone. The narratives of Scripture are representative because they are so penetrating and true. They go to the very heart of the men and things which they describe: and hence the words and acts which they record are found to contain the essential characteristics of whole classes of men, and the portrait of an individual becomes that of a class. This joyful outburst of the people of Lycaonia gives utterance to one of the most striking and universal convictions of heathenism, and

stands in very close and intimate relations with that greatest of all facts in the history of the world, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. That the gods come down in the likeness of men is the dream of heathenism. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' is the sober, waking truth which meets and vindicates and transcends that cry.

I. The heathen dream of incarnation.

In all lands we find this belief in the appearance of the gods in human form. It inspired the art and poetry of Greece. Rome believed that gods had charged in front of their armies and given their laws. The solemn, gloomy religion of Egypt, though it worshipped animal forms, yet told of incarnate and suffering gods. The labyrinthine mythologies of the East have their long-drawn stories of the avatars of their gods floating many a rood on the weltering ocean of their legends. Tibet cherishes each living sovereign as a real embodiment of the divine. And the lowest tribes, in their degraded worship, have not departed so far from the common type but that they too have some faint echoes of the universal faith.

Do these facts import anything at all to us? Are we to dismiss them as simply the products of a stage which we have left far behind, and to plume ourselves that we have passed out of the twilight?

Even if we listen to what comparative mythology has to say, it still remains to account for the tendency to shape legends of the earthly appearance of the gods; and we shall have to admit that, while they belong to an early stage of the world's progress, the feelings which they express belong to all stages of it.

Now I think we may note these thoughts as contained in this universal belief:

The consciousness of the need of divine help.

The certainty of a fellowship between heaven and earth.

The high ideal of the capacities and affinities of man.

We may note further what were the general characteristics of these incarnations. They were transient, they were 'docetic,' as they are called—that is, they were merely apparent assumptions of human form which brought the god into no nearer or truer kindred with humanity, and they were, for the most part, for very self-regarding and often most immoral ends, the god's personal gratification of very ungodlike passions and lust, or his winning victories for his favourites, or satisfying his anger by trampling on those who had incurred his very human wrath.

II. The divine answer which transcends the human dream.

We have to insist that the truth of the Incarnation is the corner-stone of Christianity. If that is struck out the whole fabric falls. Without it there may be a Christ who is the loftiest and greatest of men, but not the Christ who 'saves His people from their sins.'

That being so, and Christianity having this feature in common with all the religions of men, how are we to account for the resemblance? Are we to listen to the rude solution which says, 'All lies alike'? Are we to see in it nothing but the operation of like tendencies, or rather illusions, of human thought—man's own shadow projected on an illuminated mist? Are we to let the resemblance discredit the Christian message? Or are we to say that all these others are unconscious prophecies—man's half-instinctive expression of his deep need and much misunderstood longing, and that the Christian proclamation that Jesus is 'God manifest

in the flesh' is the trumpet-toned announcement of Heaven's answer to earth's cry?

Fairly to face that question is to go far towards answering it. For as soon as we begin to look steadily at the facts, we find that the differences between all these other appearances and the Incarnation are so great as to raise the presumption that their origins are different. The 'gods' slipped on the appearance of humanity over their garment of deity in appearance only, and that for a moment. Jesus is 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,' and is not merely 'found in fashion as a man,' but is 'in all points like as we are.' And that garb of manhood He wears for ever, and in His heavenly glory is 'the Man Christ Jesus.'

But *the* difference between all these other appearances of gods and the Incarnation lies in the acts to which they and it respectively led, and the purposes for which they and it respectively took place. A god who came down to suffer, a god who came to die, a god who came to be the supreme example of all fair humanities, a god who came to suffer and to die that men might have life and be victors over sin—where is he in all the religions of the world? And does not the fact that Christianity alone sets before men such a God, such an Incarnation, for such ends, make the assertion a reasonable one, that the sources of the universal belief in gods who come down among men and of the Christian proclamation that the Eternal Word became flesh are not the same, but that these are men's half-understood cries, and this is Heaven's answer?

'THE DOOR OF FAITH'

'And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.'—ACTS xiv. 27.

THERE are many instances of the occurrence of this metaphor in the New Testament, but none is exactly like this. We read, for example, of 'a great door and effectual' being opened to Paul for the free ministry of the word; and to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, 'He that openeth and none shall shut' graciously says, 'I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut.' But here the door is faith, that is to say faith is conceived of as the means of entrance for the Gentiles into the Kingdom, which, till then, Jews had supposed to be entered by hereditary rite.

I. Faith is the means of our entrance into the Kingdom.

The Jew thought that birth and the rite of circumcision were the door, but the 'rehearsing' of the experiences of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary tour shattered that notion by the logic of facts. Instead of that narrow postern another doorway had been broken in the wall of the heavenly city, and it was wide enough to admit of multitudes entering. Gentiles had plainly come in. How had they come in? By believing in Jesus. Whatever became of previous exclusive theories, there was a fact that had to be taken into account. It distinctly proved that faith was 'the gate of the Lord into which,' not the circumcised but the 'righteous,' who were righteous because believing, 'should enter.'

We must not forget the other use of the metaphor,

by our Lord Himself, in which He declares that He is the Door. The two representations are varying but entirely harmonious, for the one refers to the objective fact of Christ's work as making it possible that we should draw near to and dwell with God, and the other to our subjective appropriation of that possibility, and making it a reality in our own blessed experience.

II. Faith is the means of God's entrance into our hearts.

We possess the mysterious and awful power of shutting God out of these hearts. And faith, which in one aspect is our means of entrance into the Kingdom of God, is, in another, the means of God's entrance into us. The Psalm, which invokes the divine presence in the Temple, calls on the 'everlasting doors' to be 'lifted up,' and promises that then 'the King of Glory will come in.' And the voice of the ascended Christ, the King of Glory, knocking at the closed door, calls on us with our own hands to open the door, and promises that He 'will come in.'

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,' and there is no other way by which His indwelling is possible. Faith is not constituted the condition of that divine indwelling by any arbitrary appointment, as a sovereign might determine that he would enter a city by a certain route, chosen without any special reason from amongst many, but in the nature of things it is necessary that trust, and love which follows trust, and longing which follows love should be active in a soul if Christ is to enter in and abide there.

III. Faith is the means of the entrance of the Kingdom into us.

If Christ comes in He comes with His pierced hands

full of gifts. Through our faith we receive all spiritual blessings. But we must ever remember, what this metaphor most forcibly sets forth, that faith is but the means of entrance. It has no worth in itself, but is precious only because it admits the true wealth. The door is nothing. It is only an opening. Faith is the pipe that brings the water, the flinging wide the shutters that the light may flood the dark room, the putting oneself into the path of the electric circuit. Salvation is not arbitrarily connected with faith. It is not the reward of faith but the possession of what comes through faith, and cannot come in any other way. Our 'hearts' are 'purified by faith,' because faith admits into our hearts the life, and installs as dominant in them the powers, the motives, the Spirit, which purify. We are 'saved by faith,' for faith brings into our spirits the Christ who saves His people from their sins, when He abides in them and they abide in Him through their faith.

THE BREAKING OUT OF DISCORD

'And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.'—ACTS xv. 1-6.

THE question as to the conditions on which Gentiles could be received into Christian communion had already been raised by the case of Cornelius, but it became

more acute after Paul's missionary journey. The struggle between the narrower and broader views was bound to come to a head. Traces of the cleft between Palestinian and Hellenist believers had appeared as far back as the 'murmuring' about the unfair neglect of the Hellenist widows in the distribution of relief, and the whole drift of things since had been to widen the gap.

Whether the 'certain men' had a mission to the Church in Antioch or not, they had no mandate to lay down the law as they did. Luke delicately suggests this by saying that they 'came down from Judæa,' rather than from Jerusalem. We should be fair to these men, and remember how much they had to say in defence of their position. They did not question that Gentiles could be received into the Church, but 'kept on teaching' (as the word in the Greek implies) that the divinely appointed ordinance of circumcision was the 'door' of entrance. God had prescribed it, and through all the centuries since Moses, all who came into the fold of Israel had gone in by that gate. Where was the commandment to set it aside? Was not Paul teaching men to climb up some other way, and so blasphemously abrogating a divine law?

No wonder that honest believers in Jesus as Messiah shrank with horror from such a revolutionary procedure. The fact that they were Palestinian Jews, who had never had their exclusiveness rubbed off, as Hellenists like Paul and Barnabas had had, explains, and to some extent excuses, their position. And yet their contention struck a fatal blow at the faith, little as they meant it. Paul saw what they did not see—that if anything else than faith was brought in as necessary to knit men to Christ, and make them par-

takers of salvation, faith was deposed from its place, and Christianity sank back to be a religion of 'works.' Experience has proved that anything whatever introduced as associated with faith ejects faith from its place, and comes to be recognised as *the* means of salvation. It must be faith or circumcision, it cannot be faith and circumcision. The lesson is needed to-day as much as in Antioch. The controversy started then is a perennial one, and the Church of the present needs Paul's exhortation, 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.'

The obvious course of appealing to Jerusalem was taken, and it is noteworthy that in verse 2 the verb 'appointed' has no specified subject. Plainly, however, it was the Church which acted, and so natural did that seem to Luke that he felt it unnecessary to say so. No doubt Paul concurred, but the suggestion is not said to have come from him. He and Barnabas might have asserted their authority, and declined to submit what they had done by the Spirit's guidance to the decision of the Apostles, but they seek the things that make for peace.

No doubt the other side was represented in the deputation. Jerusalem was the centre of unity, and remained so till its fall. The Apostles and elders were the recognised leaders of the Church. Elders here appear as holding a position of authority; the only previous mention of them is in Acts xi. 30, where they receive the alms sent from Antioch. It is significant that we do not hear of their first appointment. The organisation of the Church took shape as exigencies prescribed.

The deputation left Antioch, escorted lovingly for a

little way by the Church, and, journeying by land, gladdened the groups of believers in ‘Phenicia and Samaria’ with the news that the Gentiles were turning to God. We note that they are not said to have spoken of the thorny question in these countries, and that it is not said that there was joy in Judæa. Perhaps the Christians in it were in sympathy with the narrower view.

The first step taken in Jerusalem was to call a meeting of the Church to welcome the deputation. It is significant that the latter did not broach the question in debate, but told the story of the success of their mission. That was the best argument for receiving Gentile converts without circumcision. God had received them; should not the Church do so? Facts are stronger than theories. It was Peter’s argument in the case of Cornelius: they ‘have received the Holy Ghost as well as we,’ ‘who was I, that I could withstand God?’ It is the argument which shatters all analogous narrowing of the conditions of Christian life. If men say, ‘Except ye be’ this or that ‘ye cannot be saved,’ it is enough to point to the fruits of Christian character, and say, ‘These show that the souls which bring them forth *are* saved, and you must widen your conceptions of the possibilities to include these actualities.’ It is vain to say ‘Ye cannot be’ when manifestly they are.

But the logic of facts does not convince obstinate theorists, and so the Judaising party persisted in their ‘It is needful to circumcise them.’ None are so blind as those to whom religion is mainly a matter of ritual. You may display the fairest graces of Christian character before them, and you get no answer but the reiteration of ‘It is needful to circumcise you.’ But on their own ground, in Jerusalem, the spokesmen of

that party enlarged their demands. In Antioch they had insisted on circumcision, in Jerusalem they added the demand for entire conformity to the Mosaic law. They were quite logical; their principle demanded that extension of the requirement, and was thereby condemned as utterly unworkable. Now that the whole battery was unmasked the issue was clear—Is Christianity to be a Jewish sect or the universal religion? Clear as it was, few in that assembly saw it. But the parting of the ways had been reached.

THE CHARTER OF GENTILE LIBERTY

'Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. 15. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. 19. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach Him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23. And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.'—ACTS xv. 12-29.

MUCH was at stake in the decision of this gathering of the Church. If the Jewish party triumphed, Christianity sank to the level of a Jewish sect. The question

brought up for decision was difficult, and there was much to be said for the view that the Mosaic law was binding on Gentile converts. It must have been an uprooting of deepest beliefs for a Jewish Christian to contemplate the abrogation of that law, venerable by its divine origin, by its hoary antiquity, by its national associations. We must not be hard upon men who clung to it; but we should learn from their final complete drifting away from Christianity how perilous is the position which insists on the necessity to true discipleship of any outward observance.

Our passage begins in the middle of the conference. Peter has, with characteristic vehemence, dwelt upon the divine attestation of the genuine equality of the uncircumcised converts with the Jewish, given by their possession of the same divine Spirit, and has flung fiery questions at the Judaisers, which silenced them. Then, after the impressive hush following his eager words, Barnabas and Paul tell their story once more, and clinch the nail driven by Peter by asserting that God had already by 'signs and wonders' given His sanction to the admission of Gentiles without circumcision. Characteristically, in Jerusalem Barnabas is restored to his place above Paul, and is named first as speaking first, and regarded by the Jerusalem Church as the superior of the missionary pair.

The next speaker is James, not an Apostle, but the bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, of whom tradition tells that he was a zealous adherent to the Mosaic law in his own person, and that his knees were as hard as a camel's through continual prayer. It is singular that this meeting should be so often called 'the Apostolic council,' when, as a fact, only one Apostle said a word, and he not as an Apostle, but as the chosen

instrument to preach to the Gentiles. ‘The elders,’ of whose existence we now hear for the first time in this wholly incidental manner, were associated with the Apostles (ver. 6), and the ‘multitude’ (ver. 12) is most naturally taken to be ‘the whole Church’ (ver. 22). James represents the eldership, and as bishop in Jerusalem and an eager observer of legal prescriptions, fittingly speaks. His words practically determined the question. Like a wise man, he begins with facts. His use of the intensely Jewish form of the name Simeon is an interesting reminiscence of old days. So he had been accustomed to call Peter when they were all young together, and so he calls him still, though everybody else named him by his new name. What God had done by him seems to James to settle the whole question; for it was nothing else than to put the Gentile converts without circumcision on an equality with the Jewish part of the Church.

Note the significant juxtaposition of the words ‘Gentiles’ and ‘people’—the former the name for heathen, the latter the sacred designation of the chosen nation. The great paradox which, through Peter’s preaching at Cæsarea, had become a fact was that the ‘people of God’ were made up of Gentiles as well as Jews—that His name was equally imparted to both. If God had made Gentiles His people, had He not thereby shown that the special observances of Israel were put aside, and that, in particular, circumcision was no longer the condition of entrance? The end of national distinction and the opening of a new way of incorporation among the people of God were clearly contained in the facts. How much Christian narrowness would be blown to atoms if its advocates would do as James did, and let God’s facts teach them the width of

God's purposes and the comprehensiveness of Christ's Church! We do wisely when we square our theories with facts; but many of us go to work in the opposite way, and snip down facts to the dimension of our theories.

James's next step is marked equally by calm wisdom and open-mindedness. He looks to God's word, as interpreted by God's deeds, to throw light in turn on the deeds and to confirm the interpretation of these. Two things are to be noted in considering his quotation from Amos—its bearing on the question in hand, and its divergence from the existing Hebrew text. As to the former, there seems at first sight nothing relevant to James's purpose in the quotation, which simply declares that the Gentiles will seek the Lord when the fallen tabernacle of David is rebuilt. That period of time has at least begun, thinks James, in the work of Jesus, in whom the decayed dominion of David is again in higher form established. The return of the Gentiles does not merely synchronise with, but is the intended issue of, Christ's reign. Lifted from the earth, He will draw all men unto Him, and they shall 'seek the Lord,' and on them His name will be called.

Now the force of this quotation lies, as it seems, first in the fact that Peter's experience at Cæsarea is to be taken as an indication of how God means the prophecy to be fulfilled, namely, without circumcision; and secondly, in the *argumentum a silentio*, since the prophet says nothing about ritual or the like, but declares that moral and spiritual qualifications—on the one hand a true desire after God, and on the other receiving the proclamation of His name and calling themselves by it—are all that are needed to make Gentiles God's people. Just because there is nothing

in the prophecy about observing Jewish ceremonies, and something about longing and faith, James thinks that these are the essentials, and that the others may be dropped by the Church, as God had dropped them in the case of Cornelius, and as Amos had dropped them in his vision of the future kingdom. God knew what He meant to do when He spoke through the prophet, and what He has done has explained the words, as James says in verse 18.

The variation from the Hebrew text requires a word of comment. The quotation is substantially from the Septuagint, with a slight alteration. Probably James quoted the version familiar to many of his hearers. It seems to have been made from a somewhat different Hebrew text in verse 17, but the difference is very much slighter than an English reader would suppose. Our text has 'Edom' where the Septuagint has 'men'; but the Hebrew words without vowels are identical but for the addition of one letter in the former. Our text has 'inherit' where the Septuagint has 'seek after'; but there again the difference in the two Hebrew words would be one letter only, so that there may well have been a various reading as preserved in the Septuagint and Acts. James adds to the Septuagint 'seek' the evidently correct completion 'the Lord.'

Now it is obvious that, even if we suppose his rendering of the whole verse to be a paraphrase of the same Hebrew text as we have, it is a correct representation of the meaning; for the 'inheriting of Edom' is no mere external victory, and Edom is always in the Old Testament the type of the godless man. The conquest of the Gentiles by the restorer of David's tabernacle is really the seeking after the Lord, and the calling of His name upon the Gentiles,

The conclusion drawn by James is full of practical wisdom, and would have saved the Church from many a sad page in its history, if its spirit had been prevalent in later ‘councils.’ Note how the very designation given to the Gentile converts in verse 19 carries argumentative force. ‘They turn to God from among the Gentiles’—if they have done that, surely their new separation and new attachment are enough, and make insistence on circumcision infinitely ridiculous. They have the thing signified; what does it matter about the sign, which is good for us Jews, but needless for them? If Church rulers had always been as open-eyed as this bishop in Jerusalem, and had been content if people were joined to God and parted from the world, what torrents of blood, what frowning walls of division, what scandals and partings of brethren would have been spared!

The observances suggested are a portion of the precepts enjoined by Judaism on proselytes. The two former were necessary to the Christian life; the two latter were not, but were concessions to the Jewish feelings of the stricter party. The conclusion may be called a compromise, but it was one dictated by the desire for unity, and had nothing unworthy in it. There should be giving and taking on both sides. If the Jewish Christians made the, to them, immense concession of waiving the necessity of circumcision, the Gentile section might surely make the small one of abstinence from things strangled and from blood. Similarities in diet would daily assimilate the lives of the two parties, and would be a more visible and continuous token of their oneness than the single act of circumcision.

But what does the reason in verse 21 mean? Why should the reading of Moses every Sabbath be a reason

for these concessions? Various answers are given: but the most natural is that the constant promulgation of the law made respect for the feelings (even if mistaken) of Jewish Christians advisable, and the course suggested the most likely to win Jews who were not yet Christians. Both classes would be flung farther apart if there were not some yielding. The general principle involved is that one cannot be too tender with old and deeply rooted convictions even if they be prejudices, and that Christian charity, which is truest wisdom, will consent to limitations of Christian liberty, if thereby any little one who believes in Him shall be saved from being offended, or any unbeliever from being repelled.

The letter embodying James's wise suggestion needs little further notice. We may observe that there was no imposing and authoritative decision of the Ecclesia, but that the whole thing was threshed out in free talk, and then the unanimous judgment of the community, 'Apostles, elders and the whole Church,' was embodied in the epistle. Observe the accurate rendering of verse 25 (R.V.), 'having come to one accord,' which gives a lively picture of the process. Note too that James's proposal of a letter was mended by the addition of a deputation, consisting of an unknown 'Judas called Barsabas' (perhaps a relative of 'Joseph called Barsabas,' the unsuccessful nominee for Apostleship in chap. i.), and the well-known Silas or Silvanus, of whom we hear so much in Paul's letters. That journey was the turning-point in his life, and he henceforward, attracted by the mass and magnetism of Paul's great personality, revolved round him, and forsook Jerusalem.

Probably James drew up the document, which has the same somewhat unusual 'greeting' as his Epistle.

The sharp reference to the Judaising teachers would be difficult for their sympathisers to swallow, but charity is not broken by plain repudiation of error and its teachers. ‘Subverting your souls’ is a heavy charge. The word is only here found in the New Testament, and means to unsettle, the image in it being that of packing up baggage for removal. The disavowal of these men is more complete if we follow the Revised Version in reading (ver. 24) ‘no commandment’ instead of ‘no such commandment.’

These unauthorised teachers ‘went’; but, in strong contrast with them, Judas and Silas are chosen out and sent. Another thrust at the Judaising teachers is in the affectionate eulogy of Paul and Barnabas as ‘beloved,’ whatever disparaging things had been said about them, and as having ‘hazarded their lives,’ while these others had taken very good care of themselves, and had only gone to disturb converts whom Paul and Barnabas had won at the peril of their lives.

The calm matter-of-course assertion that the decision which commended itself to ‘us’ is the decision of ‘the Holy Ghost’ was warranted by Christ’s promises, and came from the consciousness that they had observed the conditions which He had laid down. They had brought their minds to bear upon the question, with the light of facts and of Scripture, and had come to a unanimous conclusion. If they believed their Lord’s parting words, they could not doubt that His Spirit had guided them. If we lived more fully in that Spirit, we should know more of the same peaceful assurance, which is far removed from the delusion of our own infallibility, and is the simple expression of trust in the veracious promises of our Lord.

The closing words of the letter are beautifully

brotherly, sinking authority, and putting in the foreground the advantage to the Gentile converts of compliance with the injunctions. 'Ye shall do well,' rightly and conformably with the requirements of brotherly love to weaker brethren. And thus doing well, they will 'fare well,' and be strong. That is not the way in which 'lords over God's heritage' are accustomed to end their decrees. Brotherly affection, rather than authority imposing its will, breathes here. Would that all succeeding 'Councils' had imitated this as well as 'it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us'!

A GOOD MAN'S FAULTS

'And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark, 38. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.'—ACTS xv. 37, 38.

SCRIPTURE narratives are remarkable for the frankness with which they tell the faults of the best men. It has nothing in common with the cynical spirit in historians, of which this age has seen eminent examples, which fastens upon the weak places in the noblest natures, like a wasp on bruises in the ripest fruit, and delights in showing how all goodness is imperfect, that it may suggest that none is genuine. Nor has it anything in common with that dreary melancholy which also has its representatives among us, that sees everywhere only failures and fragments of men, and has no hope of ever attaining anything beyond the common average of excellence. But Scripture frankly confesses that all its noblest characters have fallen short of unstained purity, and with boldness of hope as great as its frankness teaches the weakest to aspire, and the most sinful to expect perfect likeness to a perfect

Lord. It is a plane mirror, giving back all images without distortion.

We recall how emphatically and absolutely it eulogised Barnabas as ‘a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith’—and now we have to notice how this man, thus full of the seminal principle of all goodness, derived into his soul by deep and constant communion through faith, and showing in his life practical righteousness and holiness, yet goes sadly astray, tarnishes his character, and mars his whole future.

The two specific faults recorded of him are his over-indulgence in the case of Mark, and his want of firmness in opposition to the Judaising teachers who came down to Antioch. They were neither of them grave faults, but they were real. In the one he was too facile in overlooking a defect which showed unfitness for the work, and seems to have yielded to family affection and to have sacrificed the efficiency of a mission to it. Not only was he wrong in proposing to condone Mark’s desertion, but he was still more wrong in his reception of the opposition to his proposal. With the firmness which weak characters so often display at the wrong time, he was resolved, come what would, to have his own way. Temper rather than principle made him obstinate where he should have been yielding, as it had made him in Antioch yielding, where he should have been firm. Paul’s remonstrances have no effect. He will rather have his own way than the companionship of his old friend, and so there come alienation and separation. The Church at Antioch takes Paul’s view—all the brethren are unanimous in disapproval. But Barnabas will not move. He sets up his own feeling in opposition to them all. The sympathy of his brethren, the work of his life, the extension of Christ’s kingdom,

are all tossed aside. His own foolish purpose is more to him in that moment of irritation than all these. So he snaps the tie, abandons his work, and goes away without a kindly word, without a blessing, without the Church's prayers—but with his nephew for whom he had given up all these. Paul sails away to do God's work, and the Church 'recommends him to the grace of God,' but Barnabas steals away home to Cyprus, and his name is no more heard in the story of the planting of the kingdom of Christ.

One hopes that his work did not stop thus, but his recorded work does, and in the band of friends who surrounded the great Apostle, the name of his earliest friend appears no more. Other companions and associates in labour take his place; he, as it appears, is gone for ever. One reference (1 Cor. ix. 6) at a later date seems most naturally to suggest that he still continued in the work of an evangelist, and still practised the principle to which he and Paul had adhered when together, of supporting himself by manual labour. The tone of the reference implies that there were relations of mutual respect. But the most we can believe is that probably the two men still thought kindly of each other and honoured each other for their work's sake, but found it better to labour apart, and not to seek to renew the old companionship which had been so violently torn asunder.

The other instance of weakness was in some respects of a still graver kind. The cause of it was the old controversy about the obligations of Jewish law on Gentile Christians. Paul, Peter, and Barnabas all concurred in neglecting the restrictions imposed by Judaism, and in living on terms of equality and association in eating and drinking with the heathen converts at Antioch. A

principle was involved, to which Barnabas had been the first to give in his adhesion, in the frank recognition of the Antioch Church. But as soon as emissaries from the other party came down, Peter and he abandoned their association with Gentile converts, not changing their convictions but suppressing the action to which their convictions should have led. They pretended to be of the same mind with these narrow Jews from Jerusalem. They insulted their brethren, they deserted Paul, they belied their convictions, they imperilled the cause of Christian liberty, they flew in the face of what Peter had said that God Himself had showed him, they did their utmost to degrade Christianity into a form of Judaism—all for the sake of keeping on good terms with the narrow bigotry of these Judaising teachers.

Now if we take these two facts together, and set them side by side with the eulogy pronounced on Barnabas as ‘a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,’ we have brought before us in a striking form some important considerations.

I. The imperfect goodness of good men.

A good man does not mean a faultless man. Of course the power which works on a believing soul is always tending to produce goodness and only goodness. But its operation is not such that we are always equally, uniformly, perfectly under its influence. Power in germ is one thing, in actual operation another. There may be but a little ragged patch of green in the garden, and yet it may be on its way to become a flower-bed. A king may not have established dominion over all his land. The actual operation of that transforming Spirit at any given moment is limited, and we can withdraw ourselves from it. It does not begin by leavening all our nature.

So we have to note—

The root of goodness.

The main direction of a life.

The progressive character of goodness.

The highest style of Christian life is a struggle. So we draw practical inferences as to the conduct of life.

This thought of imperfection does not diminish the criminality of individual acts.

It does not weaken aspiration and effort towards higher life.

It does alleviate our doubts and fears when we find evil in ourselves.

II. The possible evil lurking in our best qualities.

In Barnabas, his amiability and openness of nature, the very characteristics that had made him strong, now make him weak and wrong.

How clearly then there is brought out here the danger that lurks even in our good! I need not remind you how every virtue may be run to an extreme and become a vice. Liberality is exaggerated into prodigality; firmness, into obstinacy; mercy, into weakness; gravity, into severity; tolerance, into feeble conviction; humility, into abjectness.

And these extremes are reached when these graces are developed at the expense of the symmetry of the character.

We are not simple but complex, and what we need to aim at is a character, not an excrescence. Some people's goodness is like a wart or a wen. Their virtues are cases of what medical technicality calls hypertrophy. But our goodness should be like harmonious Indian patterns, where all colours blend in a balanced whole.

Such considerations enforce the necessity for rigid self-control. And that in two directions.

- (a) Beware of your excellences, your strong points.
- (b) Cultivate sedulously the virtues to which you are not inclined.

The special form of error into which Barnabas fell is worth notice. It was over-indulgence, tolerance of evil in a person; feebleness of grasp, a deficiency of boldness in carrying out his witness to a disputed truth. In this day liberality, catholicity, are pushed so far that there is danger of our losing the firmness of our grasp of principles, and indulgence for faults goes so far that we are apt to lose the habit of unsparing, though unangry, condemnation of unworthy characters. This generation is like Barnabas; very quick in sympathy, generous in action, ready to recognise goodness wherever it is beheld. But Barnabas may be a beacon, warning us of the possible evils that dog these excellences like their shadows.

III. The grave issues of small faults.

Comparatively trivial as was Barnabas's error, it seems to have wrecked his life, at least to have marred it for long years, and to have broken his sweet companionship with Paul. I think we may go further and say, that most good men are in more danger from trivial faults than from great ones. No man reaches the superlative degree of wickedness all at once. Few men spring from the height to the abyss, they usually slip down. The erosive action of the sand of the desert is said to be gradually cutting off the Sphinx's head. The small faults are most numerous. We are least on our guard against them. There is a microscopic weed that chokes canals. Snow-flakes make the sky as dark as an eclipse does. White ants eat a carcase quicker than a lion does.

So we urge the necessity for bringing ordinary deeds

and small actions to be ruled and guided by God's Spirit.

How the contemplation of the imperfection, which is the law of life, should lead us to hope for that heaven where perfection is.

How the contemplation of the limits of all human goodness should lead us to exclusive faith in, and imitation of, the one perfect Lord. He stands stainless among the stained. In Him alone is no sin, from Him alone like goodness may be ours.

HOW TO SECURE A PROSPEROUS VOYAGE

'And after [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11. Therefore . . . we came with a straight course.'—ACTS XVI. 10, 11.

THIS book of the Acts is careful to point out how each fresh step in the extension of the Church's work was directed and commanded by Jesus Christ Himself. Thus Philip was sent by specific injunction to 'join himself' to the chariot of the Ethiopian statesman. Thus Peter on the house-top at Joppa, looking out over the waters of the western sea, had the vision of the great sheet, knit at the four corners. And thus Paul, in singularly similar circumstances, in the little seaport of Troas, looking out over the narrower sea which there separates Asia from Europe, had the vision of the man of Macedonia, with his cry, 'Come over and help us!' The whole narrative before us bears upon the one point, that Christ Himself directs the expansion of His kingdom. And there never was a more fateful moment than that at which the Gospel, in the person of the Apostle, crossed the sea, and effected a lodgment in the progressive quarter of the world.

Now what I wish to do is to note how Paul and his little company behaved themselves when they had received Christ's commandment. For I think there are lessons worth the gathering to be found there. There was no doubt about the vision; the question was what it meant. So note three stages. First, careful consideration, with one's own common sense, of what God wants us to do—'Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us.' Then, let no grass grow under our feet—immediate obedience—'Straightway we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.' And then, patient pondering and instantaneous submission get the reward—'We came with a straight course.' He gave the winds and the waves charge concerning them. Now there are three lessons for us. Taken together, they are patterns of what ought to be in our experience, and will be, if the conditions are complied with.

I. First, Careful Consideration.

Paul had no doubt that what he saw was a vision from Christ, and not a mere dream of the night, born of the reverberation of waking thoughts and anxieties, that took the shape of the plaintive cry of the man of Macedonia. But then the next step was to be quite sure of what the vision meant. And so, wisely, he does not make up his mind himself, but calls in the three men who were with him. And what a significant little group it was! There were Timothy, Silas, and Luke—Silas, from Jerusalem; Timothy, half a Gentile; Luke, altogether a Gentile; and Paul himself—and these four shook the world. They come together, and they talk the matter over. The word of my text rendered 'assuredly gathering' is a picturesque one. It literally means 'laying things together.' They set various facts side by side, or as we say in our colloquial idiom,

'They put this and that together,' and so they came to understand what the vision meant.

What had they to help them to understand it? Well, they had this fact, that in all the former part of their journey they had been met by hindrances; that their path had been hedged up here, there, and everywhere. Paul set out from Antioch, meaning a quiet little tour of visitation amongst the churches that had been already established. Jesus Christ meant Philippi and Athens and Corinth and Ephesus, before Paul got back again. So we read in an earlier portion of the chapter that the Spirit of Jesus forbade them to speak the Word in one region, and checked and hindered them when, baffled, they tried to go to another. There then remained only one other road open to them, and that led to the coast. Thus putting together their hindrances and their stimuluses, they came to the conclusion that unitedly the two said plainly, 'Go across the sea, and preach the word there.'

Now it is a very commonplace and homely piece of teaching to remind you that time is not wasted in making quite sure of the meaning of providences which seem to declare the will of God, before we begin to act. But the commonest duties are very often neglected; and we preachers, I think, would very often do more good by hammering at commonplace themes than by bringing out original and fresh ones. And so I venture to say a word about the immense importance to Christian life and Christian service of this preliminary step—'assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us.' What have we to do in order to be quite sure of God's intention for us?

Well, the first thing seems to me to make quite sure that we want to know it, and that we do not want to

force our intentions upon Him, and then to plume ourselves upon being obedient to His call, when we are only doing what we like. There is a vast deal of unconscious insincerity in us all; and especially in regard to Christian work there is an enormous amount of it. People will say, ‘Oh, I have such a strong impulse in a given direction, to do certain kinds of Christian service, that I am quite sure that it is God’s will.’ How are you sure? A strong impulse may be a temptation from the devil as well as a call from God. And men who simply act on untested impulses, even the most benevolent which spring directly from large Christian principles, may be making deplorable mistakes. It is not enough to have pure motives. It is useless to say, ‘Such and such a course of action is clearly the result of the truths of the Gospel.’ That may be all perfectly true, and yet the course may not be the course for you. For there may be practical considerations, which do not come into our view unless we carefully think about them, which forbid us to take such a path. So remember that strong impulses are not guiding lights; nor is it enough to vindicate our pursuing some mode of Christian service that it is in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. ‘Circumstances alter cases’ is a very homely old saying; but if Christian people would only bring the common sense to bear upon their religious life which they need to bring to bear upon their business life, unless they are going into the *Gazette*, there would be less waste work in the Christian Church than there is to-day. I do not want less zeal; I want that the reins of the fiery steed shall be kept well in hand. The difference between a fanatic, who is a fool, and an enthusiast, who is a wise man, is that the one brings calm reason to

bear, and an open-eyed consideration of circumstances all round; and the other sees but one thing at a time, and shuts his eyes, like a bull in a field, and charges at that. So let us be sure, to begin with, that we want to know what God wants us to do; and that we are not palming our wishes upon Him, and calling them His providences.

Then there is another plain, practical consideration that comes out of this story, and that is, Do not be above being taught by failures and hindrances. You know the old proverb, 'It is waste time to flog a dead horse.' There is not a little well-meant work flung away, because it is expended on obviously hopeless efforts to revivify, perhaps, some moribund thing or to continue, perhaps, in some old, well-worn rut, instead of striking out into a new path. Paul was full of enthusiasm for the evangelisation of Asia Minor, and he might have said a great deal about the importance of going to Ephesus. He tried to do it, but Christ said 'No,' and Paul did not knock his head against the stone wall that lay between him and the accomplishment of his purpose, but he gave it up and tried another tack. He next wished to go up into Bithynia, and he might have said a great deal about the needs of the people by the Euxine; but again down came the barrier, and he had once more to learn the lesson, 'Not as thou wilt, but as I will.' He was not above being taught by his failures. Some of us are; and it is very difficult, and needs a great deal of Christian wisdom and unselfishness, to distinguish between hindrances in the way of work which are meant to evoke larger efforts, and hindrances which are meant to say, 'Try another path, and do not waste time here any longer.'

But if we wish supremely to know God's will, He will help us to distinguish between these two kinds of difficulties. Some one has said, 'Difficulties are things to be overcome.' Yes, but not always. They very often are, and we should thank God for them then; but they sometimes are God's warnings to us to go by another road. So we need discretion, and patience, and suspense of judgment to be brought to bear upon all our purposes and plans.

Then, of course, I need not remind you that the way to get light is to seek it in the Book and in communion with Him whom the Book reveals to us as the true Word of God: 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' So careful consideration is a preliminary to all good Christian work. And, if you can, talk to some Timothy and Silas and Luke about your course, and do not be above taking a brother's advice.

II. The next step is Immediate Submission.

When they had assuredly gathered that the Lord had called them, 'immediately'—there is great virtue in that one word—'we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.' Delayed obedience is the brother—and, if I may mingle metaphors, sometimes the father—of disobedience. It sometimes means simple feebleness of conviction, indolence, and a general lack of fervour. It means very often a reluctance to do the duty that lies plainly before us. And, dear brethren, as I have said about the former lesson, so I say about this. The homely virtue, which we all know to be indispensable to success in common daily life and commercial undertakings, is no less indispensable to all vigour of Christian life and to all nobleness of Christian service. We have no hours to waste; the time is short. In

the harvest-field, especially when it is getting near the end of the week, and the Sunday is at hand, there are little leisure and little tolerance of slow workers. And for us the fields are white, the labourers are few, the Lord of the harvest is imperative, the sun is hurrying to the west, and the sickles will have to be laid down before long. So, '*immediately we endeavoured.*'

Delayed duty is present discomfort. As long as a man has a conscience, so long will he be restless and uneasy until he has, as the Quakers say, '*cleared himself of his burden,*' and done what he knows that he ought to do, and got done with it. Delayed obedience means wasted possibilities of service, and so is ever to be avoided. The more disagreeable anything is which is plainly a duty, the more reason there is for doing it right away. '*I made haste, and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.*'

Did you ever count how many '*straightways*' there are in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel? If you have not, will you do it when you go home; and notice how they come in? In the story of Christ's opening ministry every fresh incident is tacked on to the one before it, in that chapter, by that same word '*straightway.*' '*Straightway*' He does that; '*anon*' He does this; '*immediately*' He does the other thing. All is one continuous stream of acts of service. The Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of the servant, and it sets forth the pattern to which all Christian service ought to be conformed.

So if we take Jesus Christ for our Example, unhaunting and unresting in the work of the Lord, we shall let no moment pass burdened with undischarged duty; and we shall find that all the moments are few

enough for the discharge of the duties incumbent upon us.

III. So, lastly, careful consideration and unhesitating obedience lead to a Straight Course.

Well, it is not so always, but it is so generally. There is a wonderful power in diligent doing of God's known will to smooth away difficulties and avoid troubles. I do not, of course, mean that a man who thus lives, patiently ascertaining and then promptly doing what God would have him do, has any miraculous exemption from the ordinary sorrows and trials of life. But sure I am that a very, very large proportion of all the hindrances and disappointments, storms and quick-sands, calms which prevent progress and headwinds that beat in our faces, are directly the products of our negligence in one or other of these two respects, and that although by no means absolutely, yet to an extent that we should not believe if we had not the experience of it, the wish to do God's will and the doing of it with our might when we know what it is have a talismanic power in calming the seas and bringing us to the desired haven.

But though this is not always absolutely true in regard of outward things, it is, without exception or limitation, true in regard of the inward life. For if my supreme will is to do God's will then nothing which is His will, and comes to me because it is can be a hindrance in my doing that.

As an old proverb says, 'Travelling merchants can never be out of their road.' And a Christian man whose path is simple obedience to the will of God can never be turned from that path by whatever hindrances may affect his outward life. So, in deepest truth, there is always a calm voyage for the men

whose eyes are open to discern, and whose hands are swift to fulfil, the commandments of their Father in heaven. For them all winds blow them to their port; for them 'all things work together for good'; with them God's servants who hearken to the voice of His commandments, and are His ministers to do His pleasure, can never be other than in amity and alliance. He who is God's servant is the world's master. 'All things are yours if ye are Christ's.'

So, brethren, careful study of providences and visions, of hindrances and stimulus, careful setting of our lives side by side with the Master's, and a swift delight in doing the will of the Lord, will secure for us, in inmost truth, a prosperous voyage, till all storms are hushed, 'and they are glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them to their desired haven.'

PAUL AT PHILIPPI

'And on the sabbath day we went forth without the gate, by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which were come together.'—ACTS xvi. 13 (R.V.).

THIS is the first record of the preaching of the Gospel in Europe, and probably the first instance of it. The fact that the vision of the man of Macedonia was needed in order to draw the Apostle across the straits into Macedonia, and the great length at which the incidents at Philippi are recorded, make this probable. If so, we are here standing, as it were, at the well-head of a mighty river, and the thin stream of water assumes importance when we remember the thousand miles of its course, and the league-broad estuary in which it pours itself into the ocean. Here is the beginning;

the Europe of to-day is what came out of it. There is no sign whatever that the Apostle was conscious of an epoch in this transference of the sphere of his operations, but we can scarcely help being conscious of such.

And so, looking at the words of my text, and seeing here how unobtrusively there stole into the progressive part of the world the power which was to shatter and remould all its institutions, to guide and inform the onward march of its peoples, to be the basis of their liberties, and the starting-point of their literature, we can scarcely avoid drawing lessons of importance.

The first point which I would suggest, as picturesquely enforced for us by this incident, is—

I. The apparent insignificance and real greatness of Christian work.

There did not seem in the whole of that great city that morning a more completely insignificant knot of people than the little weather-beaten Jew, travel-stained, of weak bodily presence, and of contemptible speech, with the handful of his attendants, who slipped out in the early morning and wended their way to the quiet little oratory, beneath the blue sky, by the side of the rushing stream, and there talked informally and familiarly to the handful of women. The great men of Philippi would have stared if any one had said to them, ‘You will be forgotten, but two of these women will have their names embalmed in the memory of the world for ever. Everybody will know Euodia and Syntyche. Your city will be forgotten, although a battle that settled the fate of the civilised world was fought outside your gates. But that little Jew and the letter that he will write to that handful of believers that are to be gathered by his preaching will last for ever.’ The mightiest thing done in Europe that morning was

when the Apostle sat down by the riverside, ‘and spake to the women which resorted thither.’

The very same vulgar mistake as to what is great and as to what is small is being repeated over and over again; and we are all tempted to it by that which is worldly and vulgar in ourselves, to the enormous detriment of the best part of our natures. So it is worth while to stop for a moment and ask what is the criterion of greatness in our deeds? I answer, three things—their motive, their sphere, their consequences. What is done for God is always great. You take a pebble and drop it into a brook, and immediately the dull colouring upon it flashes up into beauty when the sunlight strikes through the ripples, and the magnitude of the little stone is enlarged. If I may make use of such a violent expression, drop your deeds into God, and they will all be great, however small they are. Keep them apart from Him, and they will be small, though all the drums of the world beat in celebration, and all the vulgar people on the earth extol their magnitude. This altar magnifies and sanctifies the giver and the gift. The great things are the things that are done for God.

A deed is great according to its sphere. What bears on and is confined to material things is smaller than what affects the understanding. The teacher is more than the man who promotes material good. And on the very same principle, above both the one and the other, is the doer of deeds which touch the diviner part of a man’s nature, his will, his conscience, his affections, his relations to God. Thus the deeds that impinge upon these are the highest and the greatest; and far above the scientific inventor, and far above the mere teacher, as I believe, and as I hope you

believe, stands the humblest work of the poorest Christian who seeks to draw any other soul into the light and liberty which he himself possesses. The greatest thing in the world is charity, and the purest charity in the world is that which helps a man to possess the basis and mother-tincture of all love, the love towards God who has first loved us, in the person and the work of His dear Son.

That which being done has consequences that roll through souls, 'and grow for ever and for ever,' is a greater work than the deed whose issues are more short-lived. And so the man who speaks a word which may deflect a soul into the paths which have no end until they are swallowed up in the light of the God who 'is a Sun,' is a worker whose work is truly great. Brethren, it concerns the nobleness of the life of us Christian people far more closely than we sometimes suppose, that we should purge our souls from the false estimate of magnitudes which prevails so extensively in the world's judgment of men and their doings. And though it is no worthy motive for a man to seek to live so that he may do great things, it is a part of the discipline of the Christian mind, as well as heart, that we should be able to reduce the swollen bladders to their true flaccidity and insignificance, and that we should understand that things done for God, things done on men's souls, things done with consequences which time will not exhaust, nor eternity put a period to, are, after all, the great things of human life.

Ah, there will be a wonderful reversal of judgments one day! Names that now fill the trumpet of fame will fall silent. Pages that now are read as if they were leaves of the 'Book of Life' will be obliterated and unknown, and when all the flashing cressets in Vanity

Fair have smoked and stunk themselves out, ‘They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.’ The great things are the Christian things, and there was no greater deed done that day, on this round earth, than when that Jewish wayfarer, travel-stained and insignificant, sat himself down in the place of prayer, and ‘spake unto the women which resorted thither.’ Do not be over-cowed by the loud talk of the world, but understand that Christian work is the mightiest work that a man can do.

Let us take from this incident a hint as to—

II. The law of growth in Christ’s Kingdom.

Here, as I have said, is the thin thread of water at the source. We to-day are on the broad bosom of the expanded stream. Here is the little beginning; the world that we see around us has come from this, and there is a great deal more to be done yet before all the power that was transported into Europe, on that Sabbath morning, has wrought its legitimate effects. That is to say, ‘the Kingdom of God cometh not by observation.’ Let me say a word, and only a word, based on this incident, about the law of small beginnings and the law of slow, inconspicuous development.

We have here an instance of the law of small, silent beginnings. Let us go back to the highest example of everything that is good; the life of Jesus Christ. A cradle at Bethlehem, a carpenter’s shop in Nazareth, thirty years buried in a village, two or three years, at most, going up and down quietly in a remote nook of the earth, and then He passed away silently and the world did not know Him. ‘He shall not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets.’ And as the Christ so His Church, and so His Gospel,

and so all good movements that begin from Him. Destructive preparations may be noisy; they generally are. Constructive beginnings are silent and small. If a thing is launched with a great beating of drums and blowing of trumpets, you may be pretty sure there is very little in it. Drums are hollow, or they would not make such a noise. Trumpets only catch and give forth wind. They say—I know not whether it is true—that the *Wellingtonia gigantea*, the greatest of forest trees, has a smaller seed than any of its congeners. It may be so, at any rate it does for an illustration. The germ-cell is always microscopic. A little beginning is a prophecy of a great ending.

In like manner there is another large principle suggested here which, in these days of impatient haste and rushing to and fro, and religious as well as secular advertising and standing at street corners, we are very apt to forget, but which we need to remember, and that is that the rate of growth is swift when the duration of existence is short. A reed springs up in a night. How long does an oak take before it gets too high for a sheep to crop at? The moth lives its full life in a day. There is no creature that has helpless infancy so long as a man. We have the slow work of mining; the dynamite will be put into the hole one day, and the spark applied—and then? So ‘an inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.’

Let us apply that to our own personal life and work, and to the growth of Christianity in the world, and let us not be staggered because either are so slow. ‘The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’

How long will that day be of which a thousand years are but as the morning twilight? Brethren, you have need of patience. You Christian workers, and I hope I am speaking to a great many such now; how long does it take before we can say that we are making any impression at all on the vast masses of evil and sin that are round about us? God waited, nobody knows how many millenniums and more than millenniums, before He had the world ready for man. He waited for more years than we can tell before He had the world ready for the Incarnation. His march is very slow because it is ever onwards. Let us be thankful if we forge ahead the least little bit; and let us not be impatient for swift results which are the fool's paradise, and which the man who knows that he is working towards God's own end can well afford to do without.

And now, lastly, let me ask you to notice, still further as drawn from this incident—

III. The simplicity of the forces to which God entrusts the growth of His Kingdom.

It is almost ludicrous to think, if it were not pathetic and sublime, of the disproportion between the end that was aimed at and the way that was taken to reach it, which the text opens before us. ‘We went out to the riverside, and we spake unto the women which resorted thither.’ That was all. Think of Europe as it was at that time. There was Greece over the hills, there was Rome ubiquitous and ready to exchange its contemptuous toleration for active hostility. There was the unknown barbarism of the vague lands beyond. Think of the established idolatries which these men had to meet, around which had gathered, by the superstitious awe of untold ages, everything that was

obstinate, everything that was menacing, everything that was venerable. Think of the subtleties to which they had to oppose their unlettered message. Think of the moral corruption that was eating like an ulcer into the very heart of society. Did ever a Cortez on the beach, with his ships in flames behind him, and a continent in arms before, cast himself on a more desperate venture? And they conquered! How? What were the small stones from the brook that slew Goliath? Have we got them? Here they are, the message that they spoke, the white heat of earnestness with which they spoke it, and the divine Helper who backed them up. And we have this message. Brethren, that old word, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,' is as much needed, as potent, as truly adapted to the complicated civilisation of this generation, as surely reaching the deepest wants of the human soul, as it was in the days when first the message poured, like a red-hot lava flood, from the utterances of Paul. Like lava it has gone cold to-day, and stiff in many places, and all the heat is out of it. That is the fault of the speaker, never of the message. It is as mighty as ever it was, and if the Christian Church would keep more closely to it, and would realise more fully that the Cross does not need to be propped up so much as to be proclaimed, I think we should see that it is so. That sword has not lost its temper, and modern modes of warfare have not antiquated it. As David said to the high priests at Nob, when he was told that Goliath's sword was hid behind the ephod, 'Give me that. There is none like it.' It was not miracles, it was the Gospel that was preached, which was 'the power of God unto salvation.'

And that message was preached with earnestness.

There is one point in which every successful servant of Jesus Christ who has done work for Him, winning men to Him, has been like every other successful servant, and there is only one point. Some of them have been wise men, some of them have been foolish. Some of them have been clad with many puerile notions and much rubbish of ceremonial and sacerdotal theories. Some of them have been high Calvinists, some of them low Arminians; some of them have been scholars, some of them could hardly read. But they have all had this one thing: they believed with all their hearts what they spake. They fulfilled the Horatian principle, 'If you wish me to weep, your own eyes must overflow'—and if you wish me to believe, you must speak, not 'with bated breath and whispering humbleness,' but as if you yourself believed it, and were dead set on getting other people to believe it, too.

And then the third thing that Paul had we have, and that is the presence of the Christ. Note what it says in the context about one convert who was made that morning, Lydia, 'whose heart the Lord opened.' Now I am not going to deduce Calvinism or any other 'ism' from these words, but I pray you to note that there is emerging on the surface here what runs all through this book of Acts, and animates the whole of it, viz., that Jesus Christ Himself is working, doing all the work that is done through His servants. Wherever there are men aflame with that with which every Christian man and woman should be aflame, the consciousness of the preciousness of their Master, and their own responsibility for the spreading of His Name, there, depend upon it, will be the Christ to aid them. The picture with which one of the Evangelists closes his Gospel will be repeated: 'They

went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

Dear brethren, the vision of the man of Macedonia which drew Paul across the water from Troas to Philippi speaks to us. 'Come over and help us,' comes from many voices. And if we, in however humble and obscure, and as the foolish purblind world calls it, 'small,' way, yield to the invitation, and try to do what in us lies, then we shall find that, like Paul by the riverside in that oratory, we are building better than we know, and planting a little seed, the springing whereof God will bless. 'Thou sowest not that which shall be, but bare grain . . . and God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

THE RIOT AT PHILIPPI

'And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: 24. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.'—Acts xvi. 19-34.

THIS incident gives us the Apostle's first experience of purely Gentile opposition. The whole scene has a

different stamp from that of former antagonisms, and reminds us that we have passed into Europe. The accusers and the grounds of accusation are new. Formerly Jews had led the attack; now Gentiles do so. Crimes against religion were charged before; now crimes against law and order. Hence the narrative is more extended, in accordance with the prevailing habit of the book, to dilate on the first of a series and to summarise subsequent members of it. We may note the unfounded charge and unjust sentence; the joyful confessors and the answer to their trust; the great light that shone on the jailer's darkness.

I. This was a rough beginning of the work undertaken at the call of Christ. Less courageous and faithful men might have thought, 'Were we right in "assuredly gathering" that His hand pointed us hither, since this is the reception we find?' But though the wind meets us as soon as we clear the harbour, the salt spray dashing in our faces is no sign that we should not have left shelter. A difficult beginning often means a prosperous course; and hardships are not tokens of having made a mistake.

The root of the first antagonism to the Gospel in Europe was purely mercenary. The pythoness's masters had no horror of Paul's doctrines. They were animated by no zeal for Apollo. They only saw a source of profit drying up. Infinitely more respectable was Jewish opposition, which was, at all events, the perverted working of noble sentiments. Zeal for religion, even when the zeal is impure and the notions of religion imperfect, is higher than mere anger at pecuniary loss. How much of the opposition since and to-day comes from the same mean source! Lust and appetite organise profitable trades, in which 'the

money has no smell,' however foul the cesspool from which it has been brought. And when Christian people set themselves against these abominations, capital takes the command of the mob of drink-sellers and consumers, or of those from haunts of fleshly sin, and shrieks about interfering with honest industry, and seeking to enforce sour-faced Puritanism on society. The Church may be very sure that it is failing in some part of its duty, if there is no class of those who fatten on providing for sin howling at its heels, because it is interfering with the hope of their gains.

The charge against the little group took no heed of the real character of their message. It artfully put prominent their nationality. These early anti-Semitic agitators knew the value of a good solid prejudice, and of a nickname. 'Jews'—that was enough. The rioters were 'Romans'—of a sort, no doubt, but it was poor pride for a Macedonian to plume himself on having lost his nationality. The great crime laid to Paul's charge was—troubling the city. So it always is. Whether it be George Fox, or John Wesley, or the Salvation Army, the disorderly elements of every community attack the preachers of the Gospel in the name of order, and break the peace in their eagerness to have it kept. There was no 'trouble' in Philippi, but the uproar which they themselves were making. The quiet praying-place by the riverside, and the silencing of the maiden's shout in the streets, were not exactly the signs of disturbers of civic tranquillity.

The accuracy of the charge may be measured by the ignorance of the accusers that Paul and his friends were in any way different from the run of Jews. No doubt they were supposed to be teaching Jewish practices, which were supposed to be inconsistent with Roman

citizenship. But if the magistrates had said, ‘What customs?’ the charge would have collapsed. Thank God, the Gospel has a witness to bear against many ‘customs’; but it does not begin by attacking even these, much less by prescribing illegalities. Its errand was and is to the individual first. It sets the inner man right with God, and then the new life works itself out, and will war against evils which the old life deemed good; but the conception of Christianity as a code regulating actions is superficial, whether it is held by friends or foes.

There is always a mob ready to follow any leader, especially if there is the prospect of hurting somebody. The lovers of tranquillity showed how they loved it by dragging Paul and Silas into the forum, and bellowing untrue charges against them. The mob seconded them; ‘they rose up together [with the slave-owners] against Paul and Silas.’ The magistrates, knowing the ticklish material that they had to deal with, and seeing only a couple of Jews from nobody knew where, did not think it worth while to inquire or remonstrate. They were either cowed or indifferent; and so, to show how zealous they and the mob were for Roman law, they drove a coach-and-six clean through it, and without the show of investigation, scourged and threw into prison the silent Apostles. It was a specimen of what has happened too often since. How many saints have been martyred to keep popular feeling in good tune! And how many politicians will strain conscience to-day, because they are afraid of what Luke here unpolitely calls ‘the multitude,’ or as we might render it, ‘the mob,’ but which we now fit with a much more respectful appellation!

The jailer, on his part, in the true spirit of small

officials, was ready to better his instructions. It is dangerous to give vague directions to such people. When the judge has ordered unlawful scourging, the turnkey is not likely to interpret the requirement of safe keeping too leniently. One would not look for much human kindness in a Philippian jail. So it was natural that the deepest, darkest, most foul-smelling den should be chosen for the two, and that they should be thrust, bleeding backs and all, into the stocks, to sleep if they could.

II. These birds could sing in a darkened cage. The jailer's treatment of them after his conversion shows what he had neglected to do at first. They had no food; their bloody backs were unsponged; they were thrust into a filthy hole, and put in a posture of torture. No wonder that they could not sleep! But what hindered sleep would, with most men, have sorely dimmed trust and checked praise. Not so with them. God gave them 'songs in the night.' We can hear the strains through all the centuries, and they bid us be cheerful and trustful, whatever befalls. Surely Christian faith never is more noble than when it triumphs over circumstances, and brings praises from lips which, if sense had its way, would wail and groan. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world.' The true anæsthetic is trust in God. No wonder that the baser sort of prisoners—and base enough they probably were—'were listening to them,' for such sounds had never been heard there before. In how many a prison have they been heard since!

We are not told that the Apostles prayed for deliverance. Such deliverance had not been always granted. Peter indeed had been set free, but Stephen and James had been martyred, and these two heroes had no ground

to expect a miracle to free them. But thankful trust is always an appeal to God. And it is always answered, whether by deliverance from or support in trial.

This time deliverance came. The tremor of the earth was the token of God's answer. It does not seem likely that an earthquake could loosen fetters in a jail full of prisoners, but more probably the opening of the doors and the falling off of the chains were due to a separate act of divine power, the earthquake being but the audible token thereof. At all events, here again, the first of a series has distinguishing features, and may stand as type of all its successors. God will never leave trusting hearts to the fury of enemies. He sometimes will stretch out a hand and set them free, He sometimes will leave them to bear the utmost that the world can do, but He will always hear their cry and save them. Paul had learned the lesson which Philippi was meant to teach, when he said, though anticipating a speedy death by martyrdom, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me into His heavenly Kingdom.'

III. The jailer behaves as such a man in his position would do. He apparently slept in a place that commanded a view of the doors; and he lay dressed, with his sword beside him, in case of riot or attempted escape. His first impulse on awaking is to look at the gates. They are open; then some of his charge have broken them. His immediate thought of suicide not only shows the savage severity of punishment which he knew would fall on him, but tells a dreary tale of the desperate sense of the worthlessness of life and blank ignorance of anything beyond which then infected the Roman world. Suicide, the refuge of cowards

or of pessimists, sometimes becomes epidemic. Faith must have died and hope vanished before a man can say, 'I will take the leap into the dark.'

Paul's words freed the man from one fear, but woke a less selfish and profounder awe. What did all this succession of strange things mean? Here are doors open; how came that? Here are prisoners with the possibility of escape refusing it; how came that? Here is one of his victims tenderly careful of his life and peacefulness, and taking the upper hand of him; how came that? A nameless awe begins to creep over him; and when he gets lights, and sees the two whom he had made fast in the stocks standing there free, and yet not caring to go forth, his rough nature is broken down. He recognises his superiors. He remembers the pythoness's testimony, that they told 'the way of salvation.'

His question seems 'psychologically impossible' to critics, who have probably never asked it themselves. Wonderful results follow from the judicious use of that imposing word 'psychologically'; but while we are not to suppose that this man knew all that 'salvation' meant, there is no improbability in his asking such a question, if due regard is paid to the whole preceding events, beginning with the maiden's words, and including the impression of Paul's personality and the mysterious freeing of the prisoners.

His dread was the natural fear that springs when a man is brought face to face with God; and his question, vague and ignorant as it was, is the cry of the dim consciousness that lies dormant in all men—the consciousness of needing deliverance and healing. It erred in supposing that he had to 'do' anything; but it was absolutely right in supposing that he needed

salvation, and that Paul could tell him how to get it. How many of us, knowing far more than he, have never asked the same wise question, or have never gone to Paul for an answer? It is a question which we should all ask; for we all need salvation, which is deliverance from danger and healing for soul-sickness.

Paul's answer is blessedly short and clear. Its brevity and decisive plainness are the glory of the Gospel. It crystallises into a short sentence the essential directory for all men.

See how little it takes to secure salvation. But see how much it takes; for the hardest thing of all is to be content to accept it as a gift, 'without money and without price.' Many people have listened to sermons all their lives, and still have no clear understanding of the way of salvation. Alas that so often the divine simplicity and brevity of Paul's answer are darkened by a multitude of irrelevant words and explanations which explain nothing!

The passage ends with the blessing which we may all receive. Of course the career begun then had to be continued by repeated acts of faith, and by growing knowledge and obedience. The incipient salvation is very incomplete, but very real. There is no reason to doubt that, for some characters, the only way of becoming Christians is to become so by one dead-lift of resolution. Some things are best done slowly; some things best quickly. One swift blow makes a cleaner fracture than filing or sawing. The light comes into some lives like sunshine in northern latitudes, with long dawn and slowly growing brightness; but in some the sun leaps into the sky in a moment, as in the tropics. What matter how long it takes to rise, if it does rise, and climb to the zenith?

THE GREAT QUESTION AND THE PLAIN ANSWER

'He brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'—ACTS xvi. 30, 31.

THE keeper of a Macedonian jail was not likely to be a very nervous or susceptible person. And so the extraordinary state of agitation and panic into which this rough jailer was cast needs some kind of explanation. There had been, as you will all remember, an earthquake of a strange kind, for it not only opened the prison doors, but shook the prisoner's chains off. The doors being opened, there was on the part of the jailer, who probably ought not to have been asleep, a very natural fear that his charge had escaped.

So he was ready, with that sad willingness for suicide which marked his age, to cast himself on his sword, when Paul encouraged him.

That fear then was past; what was he afraid of now? He knew the prisoners were all safe; why should he have come pale and trembling? Perhaps we shall find an answer to the question in another one. Why should he have gone to Paul and Silas, his two prisoners, for an anodyne to his fears?

The answer to that may possibly be found in remembering that for many days before this a singular thing had happened. Up and down the streets of Philippi a woman possessed with 'a spirit of divination' had gone at the heels of these two men, proclaiming in such a way as to disturb them: 'These are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation.' It was a new word and a new idea in Philippi or in Macedonia. This jailer had got

it into his mind that these two men had in their hands a good which he only dimly understood. The panic caused by the earthquake deepened into a consciousness of some supernatural atmosphere about him, and stirred in his rude nature unwonted aspirations and terrors other than he had known, which cast him at Paul's feet with this strange question.

Now do you think that the jailer's question was a piece of foolish superstition? I daresay some of you do, or some of you may suppose too that it was one very unnecessary for him or anybody to ask. So I wish now, in a very few words, to deal with these three points—the question that we should all ask, the answer that we may all take, the blessing that we may all have.

I. The question that we should all ask.

I know that it is very unfashionable nowadays to talk about 'salvation' as man's need. The word has come to be so worn and commonplace and technical that many men turn away from it; but for all that, let me try to stir up the consciousness of the deep necessity that it expresses.

What is it to be saved? Two things; to be healed and to be safe. In both aspects the expression is employed over and over again in Scripture. It means either restoration from sickness or deliverance from peril. I venture to press upon every one of my hearers these two considerations—we all need healing from sickness; we all need safety from peril.

Dear brethren, most of you are entire strangers to me; I daresay many of you never heard my voice before, and probably may never hear it again. But yet, because 'we have all of us one human heart,' a brother-man comes to you as possessing with you one

common experience, and ventures to say on the strength of his knowledge of himself, if on no other ground, ‘We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.’

Mind, I am not speaking about vices. I have no doubt you are a perfectly respectable man, in all the ordinary relations of life. I am not speaking about crimes. I daresay there may be a man or two here that has been in a dock in his day. Possibly. It does not matter whether there is or not. But I am not speaking about either vices or crimes; I am speaking about how we stand in reference to God. And I pray you to bring yourselves—for no one can do it for you, and no words of mine can do anything but stimulate you to the act—face to face with the absolute and dazzlingly pure righteousness of your Father in Heaven, and to feel the contrast between your life and what you know He desires you to be. Be honest with yourselves in asking and answering the question whether or not *you* have this sickness of sin, its paralysis in regard to good or its fevered inclination to evil. If salvation means being healed of a disease, we all have the disease; and whether we wish it or no, we want the healing.

And what of the other meaning of the word? Salvation means being safe. Are you safe? Am I safe? Is anybody safe standing in front of that awful law that rules the whole universe, ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’? I am not going to talk about any of the moot points which this generation has such a delight in discussing, as to the nature, the duration, the purpose, or the like, of future retribution. All that I am concerned in now is that all men, deep down in the bottom of their consciousness—and you and I amongst the rest—know that there *is* such a

thing as retribution here; and if there be a life beyond the grave at all, necessarily in an infinitely intenser fashion there. Somewhere and somehow, men will have to lie on the beds that they have made; to drink as they have brewed. If sin means separation from God, and separation from God means, as it assuredly does, death, then I ask you—and there is no need for any exaggerated words about it—Are we not in danger? And if salvation be a state of deliverance from sickness, and a state of deliverance from peril, do we not need it?

Ah, brethren, I venture to say that we need it more than anything else. You will not misunderstand me as expressing the slightest depreciation of other remedies that are being extensively offered now for the various evils under which society and individuals groan. I heartily sympathise with them all, and would do my part to help them forward; but I cannot but feel that whilst culture of the intellect, of the taste, of the sense of beauty, of the refining agencies generally, is very valuable; and whilst moral and social and economical and political changes will all do something, and some of them a great deal, to diminish the sum of human misery, you have to go deeper down than these reach. It is not culture that we want most; it is salvation. Brethren, you and I are wrong in our relation to God, and that means death and—if you do not shrink from the vulgar old word—damnation. We are wrong in our relation to God, and that has to be set right before we are fundamentally and thoroughly right. That is to say, salvation is our deepest need.

Then how does it come that men go on, as so many of my friends here now have gone on, all their days paying no attention to that need? Is there any folly, amidst all the irrationalities of that irrational

creature man, to be matched with the folly of steadily refusing to look forward and settle for ourselves the prime element in our condition—viz., our relation to God? Strange is it not—that power that we have of refusing to look at the barometer when it is going down, of turning away from unwholesome subjects just because we know them to be so unwelcome and threatening, and of buying a moment's exemption from discomfort at the price of a life's ruin?

Do you remember that old story of the way in which the prisoners in the time of the French Revolution used to behave? The tumbrils came every morning and carried off a file of them to the guillotine, and the rest of them had a ghastly make-believe of carrying on the old frivolities of the life of the *salons* and of society. And it lasted for an hour or two, but the tumbril came next morning all the same, and the guillotine stood there gaping in the *Place*. And so it is useless, although it is so frequently done by so many of us, to try to shut out facts instead of facing them. A man is never so wise as when he says to himself, ‘Let me fairly know the whole truth of my relation to the unseen world in so far as it can be known here, and if that is wrong, let me set about rectifying it if it be possible.’ ‘What will ye do in the end?’ is the wisest question that a man can ask himself, when the end is as certain as it is with us, and as unsatisfactory as I am afraid it threatens to be with some of us if we continue as we are.

Have I not a right to appeal to the half-sleeping and half-waking consciousness that endorses my words in some hearts as I speak? O brethren, you would be far wiser men if you did like this jailer in the Macedonian prison, came and gave yourselves no rest

till you have this question cleared up, ‘What must I do to be saved?’

There was an old Rabbi who used to preach to his disciples, ‘Repent the day before you die.’ And when they said to him, ‘Rabbi, we do not know what day we are going to die.’ ‘Then,’ said he, ‘repent to-day.’ And so I say to you, ‘Settle about the end before the end comes, and as you do not know when it may come, settle about it now.’

II. That brings me to the next point here, viz., the blessed, clear answer that we may all take.

Paul and Silas were not non-plussed by this question, nor did they reply to it in the fashion in which many men would have answered it. Take a specimen of other answers. If anybody were so far left to himself as to go with this question to some of our modern wise men and teachers, they would say, ‘Saved? My good fellow, there is nothing to be saved from. Get rid of delusions, and clear your mind of cant and superstition.’ Or they would say, ‘Saved? Well, if you have gone wrong, do the best you can in the time to come.’ Or if you went to some of our friends they would say, ‘Come and be baptized, and receive the grace of regeneration in holy baptism; and then come to the sacraments, and be faithful and loyal members of the Church which has Apostolic succession in it.’ And some would say, ‘Set yourselves to work and toil and labour.’ And some would say, ‘Don’t trouble yourselves about such whims. A short life and a merry one; make the best of it, and jump the life to come.’ Neither cold morality, nor godless philosophy, nor wild dissipation, nor narrow ecclesiasticism prompted Paul’s answer. He said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’

What did that poor heathen man know about the Lord Jesus Christ? Next to nothing. How could he believe upon Him if he knew so little about Him? Well, you hear in the context that this summary answer to the question was the beginning, and not the end, of a conversation, which conversation, no doubt, consisted largely in extending and explaining the brief formulary with which it had commenced. But it is a grand thing that we can put the all-essential truth into half a dozen simple words, and then expound and explain them as may be necessary. And I come to you now, dear brethren, with nothing newer or more wonderful, or more out of the ordinary way than the old threadbare message which men have been preaching for nineteen hundred years, and have not exhausted, and which some of you have heard for a lifetime, and have never practised, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.’

Now I am not going to weary you with mere dissertations upon the significance of these words. But let me single out two points about them, which perhaps though they may be perfectly familiar to you, may come to you with fresh force from my lips now.

Mark, first, whom it is that we are to believe on. ‘*The Lord*,’ that is the divine Name; ‘*Jesus*,’ that is the name of a Man; ‘*Christ*,’ that is the name of an office. And if you put them all together, they come to this, that He on whom we sinful men may put our sole trust and hope for our healing and our safety, is the Son of God, who came down upon earth to live our life and to die our death that He might bear on Himself our sins, and fulfil all which ancient prophecy and symbol had proclaimed as needful, and therefore certain to be done, for men. It is not a starved half-Saviour whose

name is only Jesus, and neither Lord nor Christ, faith in whom will save you. You must grasp the whole revelation of His nature and His power if from Him there is to flow the life that you need.

And note what it is that we are to exercise towards Jesus Christ. To 'believe on Him' is a very different thing from *believing Him*. You may accept all that I have been saying about who and what He is, and be as far away from the faith that saves a soul as if you had never heard His name. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to lean the whole weight of yourselves upon Him. What do you do when you trust a man who promises you any small gift or advantage? What do you do when dear ones say, 'Rest on my love'? You simply trust them. And the very same exercise of heart and mind which is the blessed cement that holds human society together, and the power that sheds peace and grace over friendships and love, is the power which, directed to Jesus Christ, brings all His saving might into exercise in our lives. Brethren, trust Him, trust Him as Lord, trust Him as Jesus, trust Him as Christ. Learn your sickness, learn your danger; and be sure of your Healer and rejoice in your security. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

III. Lastly, consider the blessing we may all receive.

This jailer about whom we have been speaking was a heathen when the sun set and a Christian when it rose. On the one day he was groping in darkness, a worshipper of idols, without hope in the future, and ready in desperation to plunge himself into the darkness beyond, when he thought his prisoners had fled. In an hour or two 'he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.'

A sudden conversion, you say, and sudden conversions are always suspicious. I am not so sure about that; they may be, or they may not be, according to circumstances. I know very well that it is not fashionable now to preach the possibility or the probability of men turning all at once from darkness to light, and that people shrug their shoulders at the old theory of sudden conversions. I think, so much the worse. There are a great many things in this world that have to be done suddenly if they are ever to be done at all. And I, for my part, would have far more hope for a man who, in one leap, sprung from the depth of the degradation of that coarse jailer into the light and joy of the Christian life, than for a man who tried to get to it by slow steps. You have to do everything in this world worth doing by a sudden resolution, however long the preparation may have been which led up to the resolution. The act of resolving is always the act of an instant. And when men are plunged in darkness and profligacy, as are, perhaps, some of my hearers now, there is far more chance of their casting off their evil by a sudden jerk than of their unwinding the snake by slow degrees from their arms. There is no reason whatever why the soundest and solidest and most lasting transformation of character should not begin in a moment's resolve.

And there is an immense danger that with some of you, if that change does not begin in a moment's resolve now, you will be further away from it than ever you were. I have no doubt there are many of you who, at any time for years past, have known that you ought to be Christians, and who, at any time for years past, have been saying to yourselves: 'Well, I will think about it, and I am tending towards it,

but I cannot quite make the plunge.' Why not; and why not now? You can if you will; you ought; you will be a better and happier man if you do. You will be saved from your sickness and safe from your danger.

The outcast jailer changed nationalities in a moment. You who have dwelt in the suburbs of Christ's Kingdom all your lives—why cannot you go inside the gate as quickly? For many of us the gradual 'growing up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' has been the appointed way. For some of us I verily believe the sudden change is the best. Some of us have a sunrise as in the tropics, where the one moment is grey and cold, and next moment the seas are lit with the glory. Others of us have a sunrise as at the poles, where a long slowly-growing light precedes the rising, and the rising itself is scarce observable. But it matters little as to how we get to Christ, if we are there, and it matters little whether a man's faith grows up in a moment, or is the slow product of years. If only it be rooted in Christ it will bear fruit unto life eternal.

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with my last question, this man rejoiced, believing in the Lord; why should not you; and why should not you now? 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' A look is a swift act, but if it be the beginning of a lifelong gaze, it will be the beginning of salvation and of a glory longer than life.

THESSALONICA AND BEREA

'Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the

devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7. Whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. 10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.'—ACTS xvii. 1-12.

'SHAMEFULLY entreated at Philippi,' Paul tells the Thessalonians, he 'waxed bold in our God to' preach to them. His experience in the former city might well have daunted a feebler faith, but opposition affected Paul as little as a passing hailstorm dints a rock. To change the field was common sense; to abandon the work would have been sin. But Paul's brave persistence was not due to his own courage; he drew it from God. Because he lived in communion with Him, his courage 'waxed' as dangers gathered. He knew that he was doing a daring thing, but he knew who was his helper. So he went steadily on, whatever might front him. His temper of mind and the source of it are wonderfully revealed in his simple words.

The transference to Thessalonica illustrates another principle of his action; namely, his preference of great centres of population as fields of work. He passes through two less important places to establish himself in the great city. It is wise to fly at the head. Conquer the cities, and the villages will fall of themselves. That was the policy which carried Christianity through the empire like a prairie fire. Would that later missions had adhered to it!

The methods adopted in Thessalonica were the usual ones. Luke bids us notice that Paul took the same

course of action in each place: namely, to go to the synagogue first, when there was one, and there to prove that Jesus was the Christ. The three Macedonian towns already mentioned seem not to have had synagogues. Probably there were comparatively few Jews in them, and these were ecclesiastically dependent on Thessalonica. We can fancy the growing excitement in the synagogue, as for three successive Sabbaths the stranger urged his proofs of the two all-important but most unwelcome assertions, that their own scriptures foretold a suffering Messiah,—a side of Messianic prophecy which was ignored or passionately denied—and that Jesus was that Messiah. Many a vehement protest would be shrieked out, with flashing eyes and abundant gesticulation, as he ‘opened’ the sense of Scripture, and ‘quoted passages,’—for that is the meaning here of the word rendered ‘alleging.’ He gives us a glimpse of the hot discussions when he says that he preached ‘in much conflict’ (1 Thess. ii. 2).

With whatever differences in manner of presentation, the true message of the Christian teacher is still the message that woke such opposition in the synagogue of Thessalonica,—the bold proclamation of the personal Christ, His death and resurrection. And with whatever differences, the instrument of conviction is still the Scriptures, ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.’ The more closely we keep ourselves to that message and that weapon the better.

The effects of the faithful preaching of the gospel are as uniform as the method. It does one of two things to its hearers—either it melts their hearts and leads them to faith, or it stirs them to more violent enmity. It is either a stone of stumbling or a sure corner-stone. We either build on or fall over it, and at last are crushed

by it. The converts included Jews and proselytes in larger numbers, as may be gathered from the distinction drawn by ‘some’—referring to the former, and ‘a great multitude’—referring to the latter. Besides these there were a good many ladies of rank and refinement, as was also the case presently at Bercea. Probably these, too, were proselytes.

The prominence of women among the converts, as soon as the gospel is brought into Europe, is interesting and prophetic. The fact of the social position of these ladies may suggest that the upper classes were freer from superstition than the lower, and may point a not favourable contrast with present social conditions, which do not result in a similar accession of women of ‘honourable estate’ to the Church.

Opposition follows as uniform a course as the preaching. The broad outlines are the same in each case, while the local colouring varies. If we compare Paul’s narrative in 1 Thessalonians, which throbs with emotion, and, as it were, pants with the stress of the conflict, with Luke’s calm account here, we see not only how Paul felt, but why the Jews got up a riot. Luke says that they ‘became jealous.’ Paul expands that into ‘they are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved.’ Then it was not so much dislike to the preaching of Jesus as Messiah as it was rage that their Jewish prerogative was infringed, and the children’s bread offered to the dogs, that stung them to violent opposition. Israel had been chosen, that it might be God’s witness, and diffuse the treasure it possessed through all the world. It had become, not the dispenser, but the would-be monopolist, of its gift. Have there been no Christian communities in later days animated by the same spirit?

There were plenty of loafers in the market-place ready for any mischief, and by no means particular about the pretext for a riot. Anything that would give an opportunity for hurting somebody, and for loot, would attract them as corruption does flesh-flies. So the Jewish ring-leaders easily got a crowd together. To tell their real reasons would scarcely have done, but to say that there was a house to be attacked, and some foreigners to be dragged out, was enough for the present. Jason's house was probably Paul's temporary home, where, as he tells us in 1 Thessalonians ii. 9, he had worked at his trade, that he might not be burdensome to any. Possibly he and Silas had been warned of the approach of the rioters and had got away elsewhere. At all events, the nest was empty, but the crowd must have its victims, and so, failing Paul, they laid hold of Jason. His offence was a very shadowy one. But since his day there have been many martyrs, whose only crime was ' harbouring' Christians, or heretics, or recusant priests, or Covenanters. If a bull cannot gore a man, it will toss his cloak.

The charge against Jason is that he receives the Apostle and his party, and constructively favours their designs. The charge against them is that they are revolutionists, rebels against the Emperor, and partisans of a rival. Now we may note three things about the charge. First, it comes with a very distinct taint of insincerity from Jews, who were, to say the least, not remarkable for loyalty or peaceful obedience. The Gracchi are complaining of sedition! A Jew zealous for Cæsar is an anomaly, which might excite the suspicions of the least suspicious ruler. The charge of breaking the peace comes with remarkable appropriateness from the leaders of a riot. They were the troublers of the

city, not Paul, peacefully preaching in the synagogue. The wolf scolds the lamb for fouling the river.

Again, the charges are a violent distortion of the truth. Possibly the Jewish ringleaders believed what they said, but more probably they consciously twisted Paul's teachings, because they knew that no other charges would excite so much hostility or be so damning as those which they made. The mere suggestion of treason was often fatal. The wild exaggeration that the Christians had 'turned the whole civilised world upside down' betrays passionate hatred and alarm, if it was genuine, or crafty determination to rouse the mob, if it was consciously trumped up. But whether the charges were believed or not by those who made them, here were Jews disclaiming their nation's dearest hope, and, like the yelling crowd at the Crucifixion, declaring they had no king but Cæsar. The degradation of Israel was completed by these fanatical upholders of its prerogatives.

But, again, the charges were true in a far other sense than their bringers meant. For Christianity is revolutionary, and its very aim is to turn the world upside down, since the wrong side is uppermost at present, and Jesus, not Cæsar, or any king or emperor or czar, is the true Lord and ruler of men. But the revolution which He makes is the revolution of individuals, turning them from darkness to light; for He moulds single souls first and society afterwards. Violence is always a mistake, and the only way to change evil customs is to change men's natures, and then the customs drop away of themselves. The true rule begins with the sway of hearts; then wills are submissive, and conduct is the expression of inward delight in a law which is sweet because the lawgiver is dear.

Missing Paul, the mob fell on Jason and the brethren.

They were 'bound over to keep the peace.' Evidently the rulers had little fear of these alleged desperate revolutionaries, and did as little as they dared, without incurring the reproach of being tepid in their loyalty.

Probably the removal of Paul and his travelling companions from the neighbourhood was included in the terms to which Jason had to submit. Their hurried departure does not seem to have been caused by a renewal of disturbances. At all events, their Berœan experience repeated that of Philippi and of Thessalonica, with one great and welcome difference. The Berœan Jews did exactly what their compatriots elsewhere would not do—they looked into the subject with their own eyes, and tested Paul's assertions by Scripture. 'Therefore,' says Luke, with grand confidence in the impregnable foundations of the faith, 'many of them believed.' True nobility of soul consists in willingness to receive the Word, combined with diligent testing of it. Christ asks for no blind adhesion. The true Christian teacher wishes for no renunciation, on the part of his hearers, of their own judgments. 'Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and swallow what I give you,' is not the language of Christianity, though it has sometimes been the demand of its professed missionaries, and not the teacher only, but the taught also, have been but too ready to exercise blind credulity instead of intelligent examination and clear-eyed faith. If professing Christians to-day were better acquainted with the Scriptures, and more in the habit of bringing every new doctrine to them as its touchstone, there would be less currency of errors and firmer grip of truth.

PAUL AT ATHENS

'Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24. God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: 28. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. 29. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31. Because he hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. 32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33. So Paul departed from among them. 34. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.'—Acts xvii. 22-34.

'I AM become all things to all men,' said Paul, and his address at Athens strikingly exemplifies that principle of his action. Contrast it with his speech in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, which appeals entirely to the Old Testament, and is saturated with Jewish ideas, or with the remonstrance to the rude Lycaonian peasants (Acts xiv. 15, etc.), which, while handling some of the same thoughts as at Athens, does so in a remarkably different manner. There he appealed to God's gifts of 'rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,' the things most close to his hearers' experience; here, speaking to educated 'philosophers,' he quotes Greek poetry, and sets forth a reasoned declaration of the nature of the Godhead and the relations of a philosophy of history and an argument against idolatry. The glories of Greek art were around him; the statues of Pallas Athene and many more fair creations looked down on the little Jew who dared to proclaim their nullity as representations of the Godhead.

Paul's flexibility of mind and power of adapting himself to every circumstance were never more strikingly shown than in that great address to the quick-witted Athenians. It falls into three parts: the conciliatory prelude (vers. 22, 23); the declaration of the Unknown God (vers. 24-29); and the proclamation of the God-ordained Man (vers. 30, 31).

I. We have, first, the conciliatory prelude. It is always a mistake for the apostle of a new truth to begin by running a tilt at old errors. It is common sense to seek to find some point in the present beliefs of his hearers to which his message may attach itself. An orator who flatters for the sake of securing favour for himself is despicable; a missionary who recognises the truth which lies under the system which he seeks to overthrow, is wise.

It is incredible that Paul should have begun his speech to so critical an audience by charging them with excessive superstition, as the Authorised Version makes him do. Nor does the modified translation of the Revised Version seem to be precisely what is meant. Paul is not blaming the Athenians, but recording a fact which he had noticed, and from which he desired to start. Ramsay's translation gives the truer notion of his meaning—‘more than others respectful of what is divine.’ ‘Superstition’ necessarily conveys a sense of blame, but the word in the original does not.

We can see Paul as a stranger wandering through the city, and noting with keen eyes every token of the all-pervading idolatry. He does not tell his hearers that his spirit burned within him when he saw the city full of idols; but he smothers all that, and speaks only of the inscription which he had noticed on one, probably obscure and forgotten, altar: ‘To the Unknown God.’

Scholars have given themselves a great deal of trouble to show from other authors that there were such altars. But Paul is as good an ‘authority’ as these, and we may take his word that he did see such an inscription. Whether it had the full significance which he reads into it or not, it crystallised in an express avowal that sense of Something behind and above the ‘gods many’ of Greek religion, which found expression in the words of their noblest thinkers and poets, and lay like a nightmare on them.

To charge an Athenian audience, proud of their knowledge, with ignorance, was a hazardous and audacious undertaking ; to make them charge themselves was more than an oratorical device. It appealed to the deepest consciousness even of the popular mind. Even with this prelude, the claims of this wandering Jew to pose as the instructor of Epicureans and Stoies, and to possess a knowledge of the Divine which they lacked, were daring. But how calmly and confidently Paul makes them, and with what easy and conciliatory adoption of their own terminology, if we adopt the reading of verse 23 in Revised Version (‘What ye worship . . . this,’ etc.), which puts forward the abstract conception of divinity rather than the personal God.

The spirit in which Paul approached his difficult audience teaches all Christian missionaries and controversialists a needed and neglected lesson. We should accentuate points of resemblance rather than of difference, to begin with. We should not run a tilt against even errors, and so provoke to their defence, but rather find in creeds and practices an ignorant groping after, and so a door of entrance for, the truth which we seek to recommend.

II. The declaration of the Unknown God has been

prepared for, and now follows, and with it is bound up a polemic against idolatry. Conciliation is not to be carried so far as to hide the antagonism between the truth and error. We may give non-Christian systems of religion credit for all the good in them, but we are not to blink their contrariety to the true religion. Conciliation and controversy are both needful; and he is the best Christian teacher who has mastered the secret of the due proportion between them.

Every word of Paul's proclamation strikes full and square at some counter belief of his hearers. He begins with creation, which he declares to have been the act of one personal God, and neither of a multitude of deities, as some of his hearers held, nor of an impersonal blind power, as others believed, nor the result of chance, nor eternal, as others maintained. He boldly proclaims there, below the shadow of the Parthenon, that there is but one God,—the universal Lord, because the universal Creator. Many consequences from that fact, no doubt, crowded into Paul's mind; but he swiftly turns to its bearing on the pomp of temples which were the glory of Athens, and the multitude of sacrifices which he had beheld on their altars. The true conception of God as the Creator and Lord of all things cuts up by the roots the pagan notions of temples as dwelling-places of a god and of sacrifices as ministering to his needs. With one crushing blow Paul pulverises the fair fanes around him, and declares that sacrifice, as practised there, contradicted the plain truth as to God's nature. To suppose that man can give anything to Him, or that He needs anything, is absurd. All heathen worship reverses the parts of God and man, and loses sight of the fact that He is the giver continually and of every-

thing. Life in its origination, the continuance thereof (breath), and all which enriches it, are from Him. Then true worship will not be giving to, but thankfully accepting from and using for, Him, His manifold gifts.

So Paul declares the one God as Creator and Sustainer of all. He goes on to sketch in broad outline what we may call a philosophy of history. The declaration of the unity of mankind was a wholly strange message to proud Athenians, who believed themselves to be a race apart, not only from the 'barbarians,' whom all Greeks regarded as made of other clay than they, but from the rest of the Greek world. It flatly contradicted one of their most cherished prerogatives. Not only does Paul claim one origin for all men, but he regards all nations as equally cared for by the one God. His hearers believed that each people had its own patron deities, and that the wars of nations were the wars of their gods, who won for them territory, and presided over their national fortunes. To all that way of thinking the Apostle opposes the conception, which naturally follows from his fundamental declaration of the one Creator, of His providential guidance of all nations in regard to their place in the world and the epochs of their history.

But he rises still higher when he declares the divine purpose in all the tangled web of history—the variety of conditions of nations, their rise and fall, their glory and decay, their planting in their lands and their rooting out,—to be to lead all men to 'seek God.' That is the deepest meaning of history. The whole course of human affairs is God's drawing men to Himself. Not only in Judea, nor only by special revelation, but by the gifts bestowed, and the schooling brought to bear on every nation, He would stir men up to seek for Him.

But that great purpose has not been realised. There is a tragic ‘if haply’ inevitable; and men may refuse to yield to the impulses towards God. They are the more likely to do so, inasmuch as to find Him they must ‘feel after Him,’ and that is hard. The tendrils of a plant turn to the far-off light, but men’s spirits do not thus grope after God. Something has come in the way which frustrates the divine purpose, and makes men blind and unwilling to seek Him.

Paul does not at once draw the two plain inferences, that there must be something more than the nations have had, if they are to find God, even His seeking them in some new fashion; and that the power which neutralises God’s design in creation and providence is sin. He has a word to say about both these, but for the moment he contents himself with pointing to the fact, attested by his hearers’ consciousness, and by many a saying of thinkers and poets, that the failure to find God does not arise from His hiding Himself in some remote obscurity. Men are plunged, as it were, in the ocean of God, encompassed by Him as an atmosphere, and—highest thought of all, and not strange to Greek thought of the nobler sort—kindred with Him as both drawing life from Him and being in His image. Whence, then, but from their own fault, could men have failed to find God? If He is ‘unknown,’ it is not because He has shrouded Himself in darkness, but because they do not love the light. One swift glance at the folly of idolatry, as demonstrated by this thought of man’s being the offspring of God, leads naturally to the properly Christian conclusion of the address.

III. It is probable that this part of it was prematurely ended by the mockery of some and the impatience of others, who had had enough of Paul and his talk, and

who, when they said, ‘We will hear thee again,’ meant, ‘We will not hear you now.’ But, even in the compass permitted him, he gives much of his message.

We can but briefly note the course of thought. He comes back to his former word ‘ignorance,’ bitter pill as it was for the Athenian cultured class to swallow. He has shown them how their religion ignores or contradicts the true conceptions of God and man. But he no sooner brings the charge than he proclaims God’s forbearance. And he no sooner proclaims God’s forbearance than he rises to the full height of his mission as God’s ambassador, and speaks in authoritative tones, as bearing His ‘commands.’

Now the hint in the previous part is made more plain. The demand for repentance implies sin. Then the ‘ignorance’ was not inevitable or innocent. There was an element of guilt in men’s not feeling after God, and sin is universal, for ‘all men everywhere’ are summoned to repent. Philosophers and artists, and cultivated triflers, and sincere worshippers of Pallas and Zeus, and all ‘barbarian’ people, are alike here. That would grate on Athenian pride, as it grates now on ours. The reason for repentance would be as strange to the hearers as the command was—a universal judgment, of which the principle was to be rigid righteousness, and the Judge, not Minos or Rhadamanthus, but ‘a Man’ ordained for that function.

What raving nonsense that would appear to men who had largely lost the belief in a life beyond the grave! The universal Judge a man! No wonder that the quick Athenian sense of the ridiculous began to rise against this Jew fanatic, bringing his dreams among cultured people like them! And the proof which he alleged as evidence to all men that it is so,

would sound even more ridiculous than the assertion meant to be proved. ‘A man has been raised from the dead; and this anonymous Man, whom nobody ever heard of before, and who is no doubt one of the speaker’s countrymen, is to judge us, Stoics, Epicureans, polished people, and we are to be herded to His bar in company with Boeotians and barbarians! The man is mad.’

So the assembly broke up in inextinguishable laughter, and Paul silently ‘departed from among them,’ having never named the name of Jesus to them. He never more earnestly tried to adapt his teaching to his audience; he never was more unsuccessful in his attempt by all means to gain some. Was it a remembrance of that scene in Athens that made him write to the Corinthians that his message was ‘to the Greeks foolishness’?

THE MAN WHO IS JUDGE

‘ . . . He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.’—ACTS xvii. 31.

I. The Resurrection of Jesus gives assurance of judgment.

(a) Christ’s Resurrection is the pledge of ours.

The belief in a future life, as entertained by Paul’s hearers on Mars Hill, was shadowy and dashed with much unbelief. Disembodied spirits wandered ghost-like and spectral in a shadowy underworld.

The belief in the Resurrection of Jesus converts the Greek peradventure into a fact. It gives that belief solidity and makes it easier to grasp firmly. Unless

the thought of a future life is completed by the belief that it is a corporeal life, it will never have definiteness and reality enough to sustain itself as a counterpoise to the weight of things seen.

(b) Resurrection implies judgment.

A future bodily life affirms individual identity as persisting beyond the accident of death, and can only be conceived of as a state in which the earthly life is fully developed in its individual results. The dead, who are raised, are raised that they may 'receive the things done in the body, according to that they have done, whether it be good or bad.' Historically, the two thoughts have always gone together; and as has been the clearness with which a resurrection has been held as certain, so has been the force with which the anticipation of judgment to come has impinged on conscience.

Jesus is, even in this respect, our Example, for the glory to which He was raised and in which He reigns now is the issue of His earthly life; and in His Resurrection and Ascension we have the historical fact which certifies to all men that a life of self-sacrifice here will assuredly flower into a life of glory there, 'Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies.'

II. The Resurrection of Jesus gives the assurance that He is Judge.

The bare fact that He is risen does not carry that assurance; we have to take into account that He has risen.

After such a life.

His Resurrection was God's setting the seal of His approval and acceptance on Christ's work; His endorsement of Christ's claims to special relations with Him; His affirmation of Christ's sinlessness. Jesus had declared that He did always the things that pleased the

Father; had claimed to be the pure and perfect realisation of the divine ideal of manhood; had presented Himself as the legitimate object of utter devotion and of religious trust, love, and obedience, and as the only way to God. Men said that He was a blasphemer; God said, and said most emphatically, by raising Him from the dead: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

With such a sequel.

'Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more,' and that fact sets Him apart from others who, according to Scripture, have been raised. His resurrection is, if we may use such a figure, a point; His Ascension and Session at the right hand of God are the line into which the point is prolonged. And from both the point and the line come the assurance that He is the Judge.

III. The risen Jesus is Judge because He is Man.

That seems a paradox. It is a commonplace that we are incompetent to judge another, for human eyes cannot read the secrets of a human heart, and we can only surmise, not know, each other's motives, which are the all-important part of our deeds. But when we rightly understand Christ's human nature, we understand how fitted He is to be our Judge, and how blessed it is to think of Him as such. Paul tells the Athenians with deep significance that He who is to be their and the world's Judge is 'the Man.' He sums up human nature in Himself, He is the ideal and the real Man.

And further, Paul tells his hearers that God judges 'through' Him, and does so 'in righteousness.' He is fitted to be our Judge, because He perfectly and completely bears our nature, knows by experience all its weaknesses and windings, as from the inside, so

to speak, and is ‘wondrous kind’ with the kindness which ‘fellow-feeling’ enkindles. He knows us with the knowledge of a God; He knows us with the sympathy of a brother.

The Man who has died for all men thereby becomes the Judge of all. Even in this life, Jesus and His Cross judge us. Our disposition towards Him is the test of our whole character. By their attitude to Him, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. ‘What think ye of Christ?’ is the question, the answer to which determines our fate, because it reveals our inmost selves and their capacities for receiving blessing or harm from God and His mercy. Jesus Himself has taught us that ‘in that day’ the condition of entrance into the Kingdom is ‘doing the will of My Father which is in heaven.’ He has also taught us that ‘this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.’ Faith in Jesus as our Saviour is the root from which will grow the good tree which will bring forth good fruit, bearing which our love will be ‘made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.’

PAUL AT CORINTH

‘After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Clandins had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome;) and came unto them. 3. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers. 4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10. For I am with thee, and no man

shall set on thee to hurt thee : for I have much people in this city. 11. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.' —ACTS xviii. 1-11.

SOLITUDE is a hard trial for sensitive natures, and tends to weaken their power of work. Paul was entirely alone in Athens, and appears to have cut his stay there short, since his two companions, who were to have joined him in that city, did not do so till after he had been some time in Corinth. His long stay there has several well-marked stages, which yield valuable lessons.

I. First, we note the solitary Apostle, seeking friends, toiling for bread, and withal preaching Christ. Corinth was a centre of commerce, of wealth, and of moral corruption. The celebrated local worship of Aphrodite fed the corruption as well as the wealth. The Apostle met there with a new phase of Greek life, no less formidable in antagonism to the Gospel than the culture of Athens. He tells us that he entered on his work in Corinth 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,' but also that he did not try to attract by adaptation of his words to the prevailing tastes either of Greek or Jew, but preached 'Jesus Christ, and Him crucified,' knowing that, while that appeared to go right in the teeth of the demands of both, it really met their wants. This ministry was begun, in his usual fashion, very unobtrusively and quietly. His first care was to find a home; his second, to provide his daily bread; and then he was free to take the Sabbath for Christian work in the synagogue.

We cannot tell whether he had had any previous acquaintance with Aquila and his wife, nor indeed is it certain that they had previously been Christians. Paul's reason for living with them was simply the convenience of getting work at his trade, and it seems probable that,

if they had been disciples, that fact would have been named as part of his reason. Pontus lay to the north of Cilicia, and though widely separated from it, was near enough to make a kind of bond as of fellow-countrymen, which would be the stronger because they had the same craft at their finger-ends.

It was the wholesome practice for every Rabbi to learn some trade. If all graduates had to do the same now there would be fewer educated idlers, who are dangerous to society and burdens to themselves and their friends. What a curl of contempt would have lifted the lips of the rich men of Corinth if they had been told that the greatest man in their city was that little Jew tent-maker, and that in this unostentatious fashion he had begun to preach truths which would be like a charge of dynamite to all their social and religious order! True zeal can be patiently silent.

Sewing rough goat's-hair cloth into tents may be as truly serving Christ as preaching His name. All manner of work that contributes to the same end is the same in worth and in recompense. Perhaps the wholesomest form of Christian ministry is that after the Apostolic pattern, when the teacher can say, as Paul did to the people of Corinth, 'When I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man.' If not in letter, at any rate in spirit, his example must be followed. If the preacher would win souls he must be free from any taint of suspicion as to money.

II. The second stage in Paul's Corinthian residence is the increased activity when his friends, Silas and Timothy, came from Berea. We learn from Philippians iv. 15, and 2 Corinthians xi. 9, that they brought gifts from the Church at Philippi; and from 1 Thessalonians

iii. 6, that they brought something still more gladdening namely, good accounts of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian converts. The money would make it less necessary to spend most of the week in manual labour; the glad tidings of the Thessalonians' 'faith and love' did bring fresh life, and the presence of his helpers would cheer him. So a period of enlarged activity followed their coming.

The reading of verse 5, 'Paul was constrained by the word,' brings out strikingly the Christian impulse which makes speech of the Gospel a necessity. The force of that impulse may vary, as it did with Paul; but if we have any deep possession of the grace of God for ourselves, we shall, like him, feel it pressing us for utterance, as soon as the need of providing daily bread becomes less stringent and our hearts are gladdened by Christian communion. It augurs ill for a man's hold of the word if the word does not hold him. He who never felt that he was weary of forbearing, and that the word was like a fire, if it was 'shut up in his bones,' has need to ask himself if he has any belief in the Gospel. The craving to impart ever accompanies real possession.

The Apostle's solemn symbolism, announcing his cessation of efforts among the Jews, has of course reference only to Corinth, for we find him in his subsequent ministry adhering to his method, 'to the Jew first.' It is a great part of Christian wisdom in evangelical work to recognise the right time to give up efforts which have been fruitless. Much strength is wasted, and many hearts depressed, by obstinate continuance in such methods or on such fields as have cost much effort and yielded no fruit. We often call it faith, when it is only pride, which prevents the acknowledgment of failure. Better to learn the lessons

taught by Providence, and to try a new 'claim,' than to keep on digging and washing when we only find sand and mud. God teaches us by failures as well as by successes. Let us not be too conceited to learn the lesson or to confess defeat, and shift our ground accordingly.

It is a solemn thing to say 'I am clean.' We need to have been very diligent, very loving, very prayerful to God, and very persuasive in pleading with men, before we dare to roll all the blame of their condemnation on themselves. But we have no right to say, 'Henceforth I go to' others, until we can say that we have done all that man—or, at any rate, that we—can do to avert the doom.

Paul did not go so far away but that any whose hearts God had touched could easily find him. It was with a lingering eye to his countrymen that he took up his abode in the house of 'one that feared God,' that is, a proselyte; and that he settled down next door to the synagogue. What a glimpse of yearning love which cannot bear to give Israel up as hopeless, that simple detail gives us! And may we not say that the yearning of the servant is caught from the example of the Master? 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?' Does not Christ, in His long-suffering love, linger in like manner round each closed heart? and if He withdraws a little way, does He not do so rather to stimulate search after Him, and tarry near enough to be found by every seeking heart?

Paul's purpose in his solemn warning to the Jews of Corinth was partly accomplished. The ruler of the synagogue 'believed in the Lord with all his house.' Thus men are sometimes brought to decision for Christ by the apparently impending possibility of His Gospel leaving them to themselves. 'Blessings brighten as

they take their flight.' Severity sometimes effects what forbearance fails to achieve. If the train is on the point of starting, the hesitating passenger will swiftly make up his mind and rush for a seat. It is permissible to press for immediate decision on the ground that the time is short, and that soon these things 'will be hid from the eyes.'

We learn from 1 Corinthians i. 14, that Paul deviated from his usual practice, and himself baptized Crispus. We may be very sure that his doing so arose from no unworthy subserviency to an important convert, but indicated how deeply grateful he was to the Lord for giving him, as a seal to a ministry which had seemed barren, so encouraging a token. The opposition and blasphemy of many are outweighed, to a true evangelist, by the conversion of one; and while all souls are in one aspect equally valuable, they are unequal in the influence which they may exert on others. So it was with Crispus, for 'many of the Corinthians hearing' of such a signal fact as the conversion of the chief of the synagogue, likewise 'believed.' We may distinguish in our estimate of the value of converts, without being untrue to the great principle that all men are equally precious in Christ's eyes.

III. The next stage is the vision to Paul and his consequent protracted residence in Corinth. God does not waste visions, nor bid men put away fears which are not haunting them. This vision enables us to conceive Paul's state of mind when it came to him. He was for some reason cast down. He had not been so when things looked much more hopeless. But though now he had his friends and many converts, some mood of sadness crept over him. Men like him are often swayed by impulses rising within, and quite apart from out-

ward circumstances. Possibly he had reason to apprehend that his very success had sharpened hostility, and to anticipate danger to life. The contents of the vision make this not improbable.

But the mere calming of fear, worthy object as it is, is by no means the main part of the message of the vision. ‘Speak, and hold not thy peace,’ is its central word. Fear which makes a Christian dumb is always cowardly, and always exaggerated. Speech which comes from trembling lips may be very powerful, and there is no better remedy for terror than work for Christ. If we screw ourselves up to do what we fear to do, the dread vanishes, as a bather recovers himself as soon as his head has once been under water.

Why was Paul not to be afraid? It is easy to say, ‘Fear not,’ but unless the exhortation is accompanied with some good reason shown, it is wasted breath. Paul got a truth put into his heart which ends all fear—‘For I am with thee.’ Surely that is enough to exorcise all demons of cowardice or despondency, and it is the assurance that all Christ’s servants may lay up in their hearts, for use at all moments and in all moods. His presence, in no metaphor, but in deepest inmost reality, is theirs, and whether their fears come from without or within, His presence is more than enough to make them brave and strong.

Paul needed a vision, for Paul had never seen Christ ‘after the flesh,’ nor heard His parting promise. We do not need it, for we have the unalterable word, which He left with all His disciples when He ascended, and which remains true to the ends of the world and till the world ends.

The consequence of Christ’s presence is not exemption from attacks, but preservation in them. Men may ‘set

on' Paul, but they cannot 'hurt' him. The promise was literally fulfilled when the would-be accusers were contemptuously sent away by Gallio, the embodiment of Roman even-handedness and despising of the deepest things. It is fulfilled no less truly to-day; for no hurt can come to us if Christ is with us, and whatever does come is not hurt.

'I have much people in this city.' Jesus saw what Paul did not, the souls yet to be won for Him. That loving Eye gladly beholds His own sheep, though they may be yet in danger of the wolves, and far from the Shepherd. 'Them also He must bring'; and His servants are wise if, in all their labours, they cherish the courage that comes from the consciousness of His presence, and the unquenchable hope, which sees in the most degraded and alienated those whom the Good Shepherd will yet find in the wilderness and bear back to the fold. Such a hope will quicken them for all service, and such a vision will embolden them in all peril.

'CONSTRAINED BY THE WORD'

'And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified.'--ACTS xviii. 5.

THE Revised Version, in concurrence with most recent authorities, reads, instead of 'pressed in the spirit,' 'constrained by the word.' One of these alterations depends on a diversity of reading, the other on a difference of translation. The one introduces a significant difference of meaning; the other is rather a change of expression. The word rendered here 'pressed,' and by the Revised Version 'constrained,' is employed in its literal use in 'Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee,' and in its metaphorical

application in ‘The love of Christ constraineth us.’ There is not much difference between ‘constrained’ and ‘pressed,’ but there is a large difference between ‘in the spirit’ and ‘by the word.’ ‘Pressed in the spirit’ simply describes a state of feeling or mind; ‘constrained by the word’ declares the force which brought about that condition of pressure or constraint. What then does ‘constrained by the word’ refer to? It indicates that Paul’s message had a grip of him, and held him hard, and forced him to deliver it.

One more preliminary remark is that our text evidently brings this state of mind of the Apostle, and the coming of his two friends Silas and Timothy, into relation as cause and effect. He had been alone in Corinth. His work of late had not been encouraging. He had been comparatively silent there, and had spent most of his time in tent-making. But when his two friends came a cloud was lifted off his spirit, and he sprang back again, as it were, to his old form and to his old work.

Now if we take that point of view with regard to the passage before us, I think we shall find that it yields valuable lessons, some of which I wish to try to enforce now.

I. Let me ask you to look with me at the downcast Apostle.

‘Downcast,’ you say; ‘is not that an unworthy word to use about a minister of Jesus Christ inspired as Paul was?’ By no means. We shall very much mistake both the nature of inspiration and the character of this inspired Apostle, if we do not recognise that he was a man of many moods and tremulously susceptible to external influences. Such music would never have

come from him if his soul had not been like an Æolian harp, hung in a tree and vibrating in response to every breeze. And so we need not hesitate to speak of the Apostle's mood, as revealed to us in the passage before us, as being downcast.

Now notice that in the verses preceding my text his conduct is extremely abnormal and unlike his usual procedure. He goes into Corinth, and he does next to nothing in evangelistic work. He repairs to the synagogue once a week, and talks to the Jews there. But that is all. The notice of his reasoning in the synagogue is quite subordinate to the notice that he was occupied in finding a lodging with another pauper Jew and stranger in the great city, and that these two poor men went into a kind of partnership, and tried to earn a living by hard work. Such procedure makes a singular contrast to Paul's usual methods in a strange city.

Now the reason for that slackening of impulse and comparative cessation of activity is not far to seek. The first Epistle to Thessalonica was written immediately after these two brethren rejoined Paul. And how does the Apostle describe in that letter his feelings before they came? He speaks of 'all our distress and affliction.' He tells that he was tortured by anxiety as to how the new converts in Thessalonica were getting on, and could not forbear to try to find out whether they were still standing steadfast. Again in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, you will find that there, looking back to this period, he describes his feelings in similar fashion and says: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.' And if you look forward a verse or two in our chapter you will see that a vision came to Paul, which pre-

supposes that some touch of fear, and some temptation to silence, were busy in his heart. For God shapes His communications according to our need, and would not have said, ‘Do not be afraid, and hold not thy peace, but speak,’ unless there had been a danger both of Paul’s being frightened and of his being dumb.

And what thus brought a cloud over his sky? A little exercise of historical imagination will very sufficiently answer that. A few weeks before, in obedience, as he believed, to a direct divine command, Paul had made a plunge, and ventured upon an altogether new phase of work. He had crossed into Europe, and from the moment that he landed at the harbour of Philippi, up to the time when he took refuge in some quiet little room in Corinth, he had had nothing but trouble and danger and disappointment. The prison at Philippi, the riots that hounded him out of Thessalonica, the stealthy, hurried escape from Berœa, the almost entire failure of his first attempt to preach the Gospel to Greeks in Athens, his loneliness, and the strangeness of his surroundings in the luxurious, wicked, wealthy Greek city of Corinth—all these things weighed on him, and there is no wonder that his spirits went down, and he felt that now he must lie fallow for a time and rest, and pull himself together again.

So here we have, in this great champion of the faith, in this strong runner of the Christian race, in this chief of men, an example of the fluctuation of mood, the variation in the way in which we look at our duties and our obligations and our difficulties, the slackening of the impulse which dominates our lives, that are too familiar to us all. It brings Paul nearer us to feel that he, too, knew these ups and downs. The force that drove this meteor through the darkness varied, as the

force that impels us varies to our consciousness. It is the prerogative of God to be immutable; men have their moods and their fluctuations. Kindled lights flicker; the sun burns steadily. An Elijah to-day beards Ahab and Jezebel and all their priests, and to-morrow hides his head in his hands, and says, ‘Take me away, I am not better than my fathers.’ There will be ups and down in the Christian vigour of our lives, as well as in all other regions, so long as men dwell in this material body and are surrounded by their present circumstances.

Brethren, it is no small part of Christian wisdom and prudence to recognise this fact, both in order that it may prevent us from becoming unduly doubtful of ourselves when the ebb tide sets in on our souls, and also in order that we may lay to heart this other truth, that because these moods and changes of aspect and of vigour *will* come to us, therefore the law of life must be effort, and the duty of every Christian man be to minimise, in so far as possible, the fluctuations which, in some degree, are inevitable. No human hand has ever drawn an absolutely straight line. That is the ideal of the mathematician, but all ours are crooked. But we may indefinitely diminish the magnitude of the curves. No two atoms are so close together as that there is no film between them. No human life has ever been an absolutely continuous, unbroken series of equally holy and devoted thoughts and acts, but we may diminish the intervals between kindred states, and may make our lives so far uniform as that to a bystander they shall look like the bright circle, which a brand whirled round in the air makes the impression of, on the eye that beholds. We shall have times of brightness and of less brilliancy, of

vigour and of consequent reaction and exhaustion. But Christianity has, for one of its objects, to help us to master our moods, and to bring us nearer and nearer, by continual growth, to the steadfast, unmovable attitude of those whose faith is ever the same.

Do not forget the plain lesson which comes from the incident before us—viz., that the wisest thing that a man can do, when he feels that the wheels of his religious being are driving heavily, is to set himself doggedly to the plain, homely work of daily life. Paul did not sit and bemoan himself because he felt this slackening of impulse, but he went away to Aquila, and said, ‘Let us set to work and make camel’s-hair cloth and tents.’ Be thankful for your homely, prosaic, secular, daily task. You do not know from how many sickly fancies it saves you, and how many breaches in the continuity of your Christian feeling it may bridge over. It takes you away from thinking about yourselves, and sometimes you cannot think about anything less profitably. So stick to your work; and if ever you feel, as Paul did, ‘cast down,’ be sure that the workshop, the office, the desk, the kitchen will prevent you from being ‘destroyed,’ if you give yourselves to the plain duties which no moods alter, but which can alter a great many moods.

II. And now note the ‘constraining word.’

I have already said that the return of the two, who had been sent to see how things were going with the recent converts in the infant Churches, brought the Apostle good tidings, and so lifted off a great load of anxiety from his heart. No wonder! He had left raw recruits under fire, with no captain, and he might well doubt whether they would keep

their ranks. But they did. So the pressure was lifted off, and the pressure being lifted off, spontaneously the old impulse gripped him once more; like a spring which leaps back to its ancient curve when some alien force is taken from it. It must have been a very deep and a very habitual impulse, which thus instantly reasserted itself the moment that the pressure of anxiety was taken out of the way.

The word constrained him. What to do? To declare it. Paul's example brings up two thoughts—that that impulse may vary at times, according to the pressure of circumstances, and may even be held in abeyance for a while; and that if a man is honestly and really a Christian, as soon as the incumbent pressure is taken away, he will feel, 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' For though Paul's sphere of work was different from ours, his obligation to work and his impulse to work were such as are, or should be, common to all Christians. The impulse to utter the word that we believe and live by seems to me to be, in its very nature, inseparable from earnest Christian faith. All emotion demands expression; and if a man has never felt that he must let his Christian faith have vent, it is a very bad sign. As certainly as fermentation or effervescence demands outgush, so certainly does emotion demand expression. We all know that. The same impulse that makes a mother bend over her babe with unmeaning words and tokens that seem to unsympathetic onlookers foolish, ought to influence all Christians to speak the Name they love. All conviction demands expression. There may be truths which have so little bearing upon human life that he who perceives them feels little obligation to say anything about them. But these are the excep-

tions; and the more weighty and the more closely affecting human interests anything that we have learned to believe as truth is, the more do we feel in our hearts that, in making us its believers, it has made us its apostles. Christ's saying, 'What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the housetops,' expresses a universal truth which is realised in many regions, and ought to be most emphatically realised in the Christian. For surely of all the truths that men can catch a glimpse of, or grapple to their hearts, or store in their understandings, there are none which bring with them such tremendous consequences, and therefore are of so solemn import to proclaim to all the children of men, as the truth, which we profess we have received, of personal salvation through Jesus Christ.

If there never had been a single commandment to that effect, I know not how the Christian Church or the Christian individual could have abstained from declaring the great and sweet Name to which it and he owe so much. I do not care to present this matter as a commandment, nor to speak now of obligation or responsibility. The *impulse* is what I would fix your attention upon. It is inseparable from the Christian life. It may vary in force, as we see in the incident before us. It will vary in grip, according as other circumstances and duties insist upon being attended to. The form in which it is yielded to will vary indefinitely in individuals. But if they are Christian people it is always there.

Well then, what about the masses of so-called Christians who feel nothing of any such constraining force? And what about the many who feel enough of it to make them also feel that they are wrong in not yielding to it, but not enough to make their conduct be

influenced by it? Brethren, I venture to believe that the measure in which this impulse to speak the word and use direct efforts for somebody's conversion is felt by Christians, is a very fair test of the depth of their own religion. If a vessel is half empty it will not run over. If it is full to the brim, the sparkling treasure will fall on all sides. A weak plant may never push its green leaves above the ground, but a strong one will rise into the light. A spark may be smothered in a heap of brushwood, but a steady flame will burn its way out. If this word has not a grip of you, impelling you to its utterance, I would have you not to be too sure that you have a grip of it.

III. Lastly, we have here the witness to the word.

'He was constrained by the word, *testifying*.' Now I do not know whether it is imposing too much meaning upon a non-significant difference of expression, if I ask you to note the difference between that phrase and the one which describes his previous activity: 'He *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade' the Jews and the Greeks, but when the old impulse came back in new force, *reasoning* was far too cold a method, and Paul took to *testifying*. Whether that be so or no, mark that the witness of one's own personal conviction and experience is the strongest weapon that a Christian can use. I do not despise the place of reasoning, but arguments do not often change opinions; they never change hearts. Logic and controversial dis-coursing may 'prepare the way of the Lord,' but it is 'in the wilderness.' But when a man calls aloud, 'Come and hear all ye, and I will declare what God hath done for my soul'; or when he tells his brother, 'We have found the Messias'; or when he sticks to 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see,' it is difficult

for any one to resist, and impossible for any one to answer, that way of testifying.

It is a way that we can all adopt if we will. Christian men and women can all say such things. I do not forget that there are indirect ways of spreading the Gospel. Some of you think that you do enough when you give your money and your interest in order to diffuse it. You can buy a substitute in the militia, but you cannot buy a substitute in Christ's service. You have each some congregation to which you can speak, if it is no larger than Paul's—namely, two people, Aquila and Priscilla. What talks they would have in their lodging, as they plaited the wisps of black hair into rough cloth, and stitched the strips into tents! Aquila was not a Christian when Paul picked him up, but he became one very soon; and it was the preaching in the workshop, amidst the dust, that made him one. If we long to speak about Christ we shall find plenty of people to speak to. ‘Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord.’

Now, dear friends, I have only one word more. I have no doubt there are some among us who have been saying, ‘This sermon does not apply to me at all.’ Does it not? If it does not, what does that mean? It means that you have not the first requisite for spreading the word—viz. personal faith in the word. It means that you have put away, or at least neglected to take in, the word and the Saviour of whom it speaks, into your own lives. But it does *not* mean that you have got rid of the word thereby. It will not in that case lay the grip of which I have been speaking upon you, but it will not let you go. It will lay on you a far more solemn and awful clutch, and like a jailer with his hand on the culprit's shoulder, will ‘constrain’ you

into the presence of the Judge. You can make it a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. And though you do not grasp *it*, it grasps and holds *you*. 'The word that I speak unto him, the same shall judge him at the last day.'

GALLIO

'And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you : 15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.'—ACTS xviii. 14, 15.

THERE is something very touching in the immortality of fame which comes to the men who for a moment pass across the Gospel story, like shooting stars kindled for an instant as they enter our atmosphere. How little Gallio dreamed that he would live for ever in men's mouths by reason of this one judicial dictum ! He was Seneca's brother, and was possibly leavened by his philosophy and indisposed to severity. He has been unjustly condemned. There are some striking lessons from the story.

I. The remarkable anticipation of the true doctrine as to the functions of civil magistrates.

Gallio draws a clear distinction between conduct and opinion, and excepts the whole of the latter region from his sway. It is the first case in which the civil authorities refused to take cognisance of a charge against a man on account of his opinions. Nineteen hundred years have not brought all tribunals up to that point yet. Gallio indeed was influenced mainly by philosophic contempt for the trivialities of what he thought a superstition. We are influenced by our recognition of the sanctity of individual conviction, and still more by reverence for truth and by the belief that it

should depend only on its own power for progress and on itself for the defeat of its enemies.

II. The tragic mistake about the nature of the Gospel which men make.

There is something very pathetic in the erroneous estimates made by those persons mentioned in Acts who some once or twice come in contact with the preachers of Christ. How little they recognise what was before them ! Their responsibility is in better hands than ours. But in Gallio there is a trace of tendencies always in operation.

We see in him the practical man's contempt for mere ideas. The man of affairs, be he statesman or worker, is always apt to think that things are more than thoughts. Gallio, proconsul in Corinth, and his brother official, Pilate, in Jerusalem, both believed in powers that they could see. The question of the one, for an answer to which he did not wait, was not the inquiry of a searcher after truth, but the exclamation of a sceptic who thought all the contradictory answers that rang through the world to be demonstrations that the question had no answer. The impatient refusal of the other to have any concern in settling 'such matters' was steeped in the same characteristically Roman spirit of impatient distrust and suspicion of mere ideas. He believed in Roman force and authority, and thought that such harmless visionaries as Paul and his company might be allowed to go their own way, and he did not know that they carried with them a solvent and constructive power before which the solid-seeming structure of the Empire was destined to crumble, as surely as thick-ribbed ice before the sirocco.

And how many of us believe in wealth and material

progress, and regard the region of truth as very shadowy and remote! This is a danger besetting us all. The true forces that sway the world are ideas.

We see in Gallio supercilious indifference to mere ‘theological subtleties.’ To him Paul’s preaching and the Jews’ passionate denials of it seemed only a squabble about ‘words and names.’ Probably he had gathered his impression from Paul’s eager accusers, who would charge him with giving the name of ‘Christ’ to Jesus.

Gallio’s attitude was partly Stoical contempt for all superstitions, partly, perhaps, an eclectic belief that all these warring religions were really saying the same thing and differed only in words and names; and partly sheer indifference to the whole subject. Thus Christianity appears to many in this day.

What is it in reality? Not words but power: a Name, indeed, but a Name which is life. Alas for us, who by our jangling have given colour to this misconception!

We see in Gallio the mistake that the Gospel has little relation to conduct. Gallio drew a broad distinction between conduct and opinion, and there he was right. But he imagined that this opinion had nothing to do with conduct, and how wrong he was there we need not elaborate.

The Gospel is the mightiest power for shaping conduct.

III. The ignorant levity with which men pass the crisis of their lives.

How little Gallio knew of what a possibility was opened out before him! Angels were hovering unseen. We seldom recognise the fateful moments of our lives till they are past.

The offer of salvation in Christ is ever a crisis. It

may never be repeated. Was Gallio ever again brought into contact with Paul or Paul's Lord? We know not. He passes out of sight, the search-light is turned in another direction, and we lose him in the darkness. The extent of his criminality is in better hands than ours, though we cannot but let our thoughts go forward to the time when he, like us all, will stand at the judgment bar of Jesus, no longer a judge but judged. Let us hope that before he passed hence, he learned how full of spirit and of life the message was, which he once took for a mere squabble about 'words and names,' and thought too trivial to occupy his court. And let us remember that the Jesus, whom we are sometimes tempted to judge as of little importance to us, will one day judge us, and that His judgment will settle our fate for evermore.

TWO FRUITFUL YEARS

'And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7. And all the men were about twelve. 8. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. 10. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12. So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.'—ACTS xix. 1-12.

THIS passage finds Paul in Ephesus. In the meantime he had paid that city a hasty visit on his way back from

Greece, had left his friends, Aquila and Priscilla, in it, and had gone on to Jerusalem, thence returning to Antioch, and visiting the churches in Asia Minor which he had planted on his former journeys. From the inland and higher districts he has come down to the coast, and established himself in the great city of Ephesus, where the labours of Aquila, and perhaps others, had gathered a small band of disciples. Two points are especially made prominent in this passage—the incorporation of John's disciples with the Church, and the eminent success of Paul's preaching in Ephesus.

The first of these is a very remarkable and, in some respects, puzzling incident. It is tempting to bring it into connection with the immediately preceding narrative as to Apollos. The same stage of spiritual development is presented in these twelve men and in that eloquent Alexandrian. They and he were alike in knowing only of John's baptism; but if they had been Apollos' pupils, they would most probably have been led by him into the fuller light which he received through Priscilla and Aquila. More probably, therefore, they had been John's disciples, independently of Apollos. Their being recognised as 'disciples' is singular, when we consider their very small knowledge of Christian truth; and their not having been previously instructed in its rudiments, if they were associating with the Church, is not less so. But improbable things do happen, and part of the reason for an event being recorded is often its improbability. Luke seems to have been struck by the singular similarity between Apollos and these men, and to have told the story, not only because of its importance but because of its peculiarity.

The first point to note is the fact that these men were disciples. Paul speaks of their having ‘believed,’ and they were evidently associated with the Church. But the connection must have been loose, for they had not received baptism. Probably there was a fringe of partial converts hanging round each church, and Paul, knowing nothing of the men beyond the fact that he found them along with the others, accepted them as ‘disciples.’ But there must have been some reason for doubt, or his question would not have been asked. They ‘believed’ in so far as John had taught the coming of Messiah. But they did not know that Jesus was the Messiah whose coming John had taught.

Paul’s question is, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ Obviously he missed the marks of the Spirit in them, whether we are to suppose that these were miraculous powers or moral and religious elevation. Now this question suggests that the possession of the Holy Spirit is the normal condition of all believers; and that truth cannot be too plainly stated or urgently pressed to-day. He is ‘the Spirit, which they that believe on Him’ shall ‘receive.’ The outer methods of His bestowment vary: sometimes He is given after baptism, and sometimes, as to Cornelius, before it; sometimes by laying on of Apostolic hands, sometimes without it. But one thing constantly precedes, namely, faith; and one thing constantly follows faith, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Modern Christianity does not grasp that truth as firmly or make it as prominent as it ought.

The question suggests, though indirectly, that the signs of the Spirit’s presence are sadly absent in many professing Christians. Paul asked it in wonder. If he came into modern churches, he would have to ask it

once more. Possibly he looked for the visible tokens in powers of miracle-working and the like. But these were temporary accidents, and the permanent manifestations are holiness, consciousness of sonship, God-directed longings, religious illumination, victory over the flesh. These things should be obvious in disciples. They will be, if the Spirit is not quenched. Unless they are, what sign of being Christians do we present?

The answer startles. They had not heard whether the Holy Ghost had been *given*; for that is the true meaning of their reply. John had foretold the coming of One who should baptize with the fire of that divine Spirit. His disciples, therefore, could not be ignorant of the existence thereof; but they had never heard whether their Master's prophecy had been fulfilled. What a glimpse that gives us of the small publicity attained by the story of Jesus!

Paul's second question betrays even more astonishment than did his first. He had taken for granted that, as disciples, the men had been baptized; and his question implies that a pre-requisite of Christian baptism was the teaching which they said that they had not had, and that a consequence of it was the gift of the Spirit, which he saw that they did not possess. Of course Paul's teaching is but summarised here. Its gist was that Jesus was the Messiah whom John had heralded, that John had himself taught that his mission was preliminary, and that therefore his true disciples must advance to faith in Christ.

The teaching was welcomed, for these men were not of the sort who saw in Jesus a rival to John, as others of his disciples did. They became 'disciples indeed,' and then followed baptism, apparently not administered by Paul, and imposition of Paul's hands. The Holy Spirit

then came on them, as on the disciples on Pentecost, and ‘they spoke with tongues and prophesied.’ It was a repetition of that day, as a testimony that the gifts were not limited by time or place, but were the permanent possession of believers, as truly in heathen Ephesus as in Jerusalem; and we miss the meaning of the event unless we add, as truly in Britain to-day as in any past. The fire lit on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes. If we ‘believe,’ it will burn on our heads and, better, in our spirits.

Much ingenuity has been expended in finding profound meanings in the number of ‘twelve’ here. The Apostles and their supernatural gifts, the patriarchs as founders of Israel, have been thought of as explaining the number, as if these men were founders of a new Israel, or Apostolate. But all that is trifling with the story, which gives no hint that the men were of any special importance, and it omits the fact that they were ‘*about* twelve,’ not precisely that number. Luke simply wishes us to learn that there was a group of them, but how many he does not exactly know. More important is it to notice that this is the last reference to John or his disciples in the New Testament. The narrator rejoices to point out that some at least of these were led onwards into full faith.

The other part of the section presents mainly the familiar features of Apostolic ministration, the first appeal to the synagogue, the rejection of the message by it, and then the withdrawal of Paul and the Jewish disciples. The chief characteristics of the narrative are Paul’s protracted stay in Ephesus, the establishment of a centre of public evangelising in the lecture hall of a Gentile teacher, the unhindered preaching of the Gospel, and the special miracles accompanying it.

The importance of Ephesus as the eye and heart of proconsular Asia explains the lengthened stay. ‘A great door and effectual,’ said Paul, ‘is opened unto me’; and he was not the man to refrain from pushing in at it because ‘there are many adversaries.’ Rather opposition was part of his reason for persistence, as it should always be.

There comes a point in the most patient labour, however, when it is best no longer to ‘cast pearls’ before those who ‘trample them under foot,’ and Paul set an example of wise withdrawal as well as of brave pertinacity, in leaving the synagogue when his remaining there only hardened disobedient hearts. Note that word *disobedient*. It teaches that the moral element in unbelief is resistance of the will. The two words are not synonyms, though they apply to the same state of mind. Rather the one lays bare the root of the other and declares its guilt. Unbelief comes from disobedience, and therefore is fit subject for punishment. Again observe that expression for Christianity, ‘the Way,’ which occurs several times in the Acts. The Gospel points the path for us to tread. It is not a body of truth merely, but it is a guide for practice. Discipleship is manifested in conduct. This Gospel points the way through the wilderness to Zion and to rest. It is ‘*the Way*,’ the only path, ‘*the Way everlasting*.’

It was a bold step to gather the disciples in ‘the school of Tyrannus.’ He was probably a Greek professor of rhetoric or lecturer on philosophy, and Paul may have hired his hall, to the horror, no doubt, of the Rabbis. It was a complete breaking with the synagogue and a bold appeal to the heathen public. Ephesus must have been better governed than Philippi

and Lystra, and the Jewish element must have been relatively weaker, to allow of Paul's going on preaching with so much publicity for two years.

Note the flexibility of his methods, his willingness to use even a heathen teacher's school for his work, and the continuous energy of the man. Not on Sabbath days only, but daily, he was at his post. The multitudes of visitors from all parts to the great city supplied a constant stream of listeners, for Ephesus was a centre for the whole country. We may learn from Paul to concentrate work in important centres, not to be squeamish about where we stand to preach the Gospel, and not to be afraid of making ourselves conspicuous. Paul's message hallows the school of Tyrannus; and the school of Tyrannus, where men have been accustomed to go for widely different teaching, is a good place for Paul to give forth his message in.

The 'special miracles' which were wrought are very remarkable, and unlike the usual type of miracles. It does not appear that Paul himself sent the 'handkerchiefs and aprons,' which conveyed healing virtue, but that he simply permitted their use. The converts had faith to believe that such miracles would be wrought, and God honoured the faith. But note how carefully the narrative puts Paul's part in its right place. God 'wrought'; Paul was only the channel. If the eager people, who carried away the garments, had superstitiously fancied that there was virtue in Paul, and had not looked beyond him to God, it is implied that no miracles would have been wrought. But still the cast of these healings is anomalous, and only paralleled by the similar instances in Peter's case.

The principle laid down by Peter (ch. iii. 12) is to be

kept in view in the study of all the miracles in the Acts. It is Jesus Christ who works, and not His servants who heal by their 'own power or holiness.' Jesus can heal with or without material channels, but sometimes chooses to employ such vehicles as these, just as on earth He chose to anoint blind eyes with clay, and to send the man to wash it off at the pool. Sense-bound faith is not rejected, but is helped according to its need, that it may be strengthened and elevated.

WOULD-BE EXORCISTS

'... Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?'—ACTS xix. 15.

THESE exorcists had no personal union with Jesus. To them He was only 'Jesus whom Paul preached.' They spoke His name tentatively, as an experiment, and imitatively. To command 'in the name of Jesus' was an appeal to Jesus to glorify His name and exert His power, and so when the speaker had no real faith in the name or the power, there was no answer, because there was really no appeal.

I. The only power which can cast out the evil spirits is the name of Jesus.

That is a commonplace of Christian belief. But it is often held in a dangerously narrow way and leads to most unwise pitting of the Gospel against other modes of bettering and elevating men, instead of recognising them as allies. Earnest Christian workers are tempted to forget Jesus' own word: 'He that is not against us is for us.' There is no need to disparage other agencies because we believe that it is the Gospel which is 'the power of God unto salvation.' Many of the popular

philanthropic movements of the day, many of its curbing and enlightening forces, many of its revolutionary social ideas, are really in their essence and historically in their origin, profoundly Christian, and are the application of the principles inherent in 'the Name' to the evils of society. No doubt many of their eager apostles are non-Christian or even anti-Christian, but though some of them have tried violently to pluck up the plant by the root from the soil in which it first flowered, much of that soil still adheres to it, and it will not live long if torn from its native 'habitat.'

It is not narrowness or hostility to non-Christian efforts to cast out the demons from humanity, but only the declaration of a truth which is taught by the consideration of what is the difference between all other such efforts and Christianity, and is confirmed by experience, if we maintain that, whatever good results may follow from these other influences, it is the powers lodged in the Name of Jesus, and these alone which can, radically and completely, conquer and eject the demons from a single soul, and emancipate society from their tyranny.

For consider that the Gospel which proclaims Jesus as the Saviour is the only thing which deals with the deepest fact in our natures, the fact of sin; gives a personal Deliverer from its power; communicates a new life of which the very essence is righteousness, and which brings with it new motives, new impulses, and new powers.

Contrast with this the inadequate diagnosis of the disease and the consequent imperfection of the remedy which other physicians of the world's sickness present. Most of them only aim at repressing outward acts.

None of them touch more than a part of the whole dreadful circumference of the dark orb of evil. Law restrains actions. Ethics proclaims principles which it has no power to realise. It shows men a shining height, but leaves them lame and grovelling in the mire. Education casts out the demon of ignorance, and makes the demons whom it does not cast out more polite and perilous. It brings its own evils in its train. Every kind of crop has weeds which spring with it. The social and political changes, which are eagerly preached now, will do much; but one thing, which is the all-important thing, they will not do, they will not change the nature of the individuals who make up the community. And till that nature is changed any form of society will produce its own growth of evils. A Christless democracy will be as bad as, if not worse than, a Christless monarchy or aristocracy. If the bricks remain the same, it does not much matter into what shape you build them.

These would-be exorcists but irritated the demons by their vain attempts at ejecting them, and it is sometimes the case that efforts to cure social diseases only result in exacerbating them. If one hole in a Dutch dyke is stopped up, more pressure is thrown on another weak point and a leak will soon appear there. There is but one Name that casts a spell over all the ills that flesh is heir to. There is but one Saviour of society—Jesus who saves from sin through His death, and by participation in His life delivers men from that life of self which is the parent of all the evils from which society vainly strives to be delivered by any power but His.

II. That Name must be spoken by believing men if it is to put forth its full power.

These exorcists had no faith. All that they knew of Jesus was that He was the one 'whom Paul preached.' Even the name of Jesus is spoiled and is powerless on the lips of one who repeats it, parrot-like, because he has seen its power when it came flame-like from the fiery lips of some man of earnest convictions.

In all regions, and especially in the matter of art or literature, imitators are poor creatures, and men are quick to detect the difference between the original and the copy. The copyists generally imitate the weak points, and seldom get nearer than the imitation of external and trivial peculiarities. It is more feasible to reproduce the 'contortions of the Sibyl' than to catch her 'inspiration.'

This absence or feebleness of personal faith is the explanation of much failure in so-called Christian work. No doubt there may be other causes for the want of success, but after all allowance is made for these, it still remains true that the chief reason why the Gospel message is often proclaimed without casting out demons is that it is proclaimed with faltering faith, tentatively and without assured confidence in its power, or imitatively, with but little, if any, inward experience of the magic of its spell. The demons have ears quick to discriminate between Paul's fiery accents and the cold repetition of them. Incomparably the most powerful agency which any man can employ in producing conviction in others is the utterance of his own intense conviction. 'If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow,' said the Roman poet. Other factors may powerfully aid the exorcising power of the word spoken by faith, and no wise man will disparage these, but they are powerless without faith and it is powerful without them.

Consider the effect of that personal faith on the speaker—in bringing all his force to bear on his words; in endowing him for a time with many of the subsidiary qualities which make our words winged and weighty; in lifting to a height of self-oblivion, which itself is magnetic.

Consider its effect on the hearers—how it bows hearts as trees are bent before a rushing wind.

Consider its effect in bringing into action God's own power. Of the man, all aflame with Christian convictions and speaking them with the confidence and urgency which become them and him, it may truly be said, ‘It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.’

Here then we have laid bare the secret of success and a cause of failure, in Christian enterprise. Here we see, as in a concrete example, the truth exemplified, which all who long for the emancipation of demon-ridden humanity would be wise to lay to heart, and thereby to be saved from much eager travelling on a road that leads nowhither, and much futile expenditure of effort and sympathy, and many disappointments. It is as true to-day as it was long ago in Ephesus, that the evil spirits ‘feel the Infant’s hand from far Judea’s land,’ and are forced to confess, ‘Jesus we know and Paul we know’; but to other would-be exorcists their answer is, ‘Who are ye?’ ‘When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace.’ There is but ‘One stronger than he who can come upon him, and having overcome him, can take from him all his armour wherein he trusted and divide the spoils,’ and that is the Christ, at whose name, faithfully spoken, ‘the devils fear and fly.’

THE FIGHT WITH WILD BEASTS AT EPHESUS

* After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. 22. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. 23. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. 24. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. 26. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: 27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. 28. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 29. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. 30. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. 32. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.—ACTS xix. 21-34.

PAUL'S long residence in Ephesus indicates the importance of the position. The great wealthy city was the best possible centre for evangelising all the province of Asia, and that was to a large extent effected during the Apostle's stay there. But he had a wider scheme in his mind. His settled policy was always to fly at the head, as it were. The most populous cities were his favourite fields, and already his thoughts were travelling towards the civilised world's capital, the centre of empire—Rome. A blow struck there would echo through the world. Paul had his plan, and God had His, and Paul's was not realised in the fashion he had meant, but it was realised in substance. He did not expect to enter Rome as a prisoner. God shaped the ends which Paul had only rough-hewn.

The programme in verses 21 and 22 was modified by circumstances, as some people would say; Paul would have said, by God. The riot hastened his departure from Ephesus. He did go to Jerusalem, and he did see Rome, but the chain of events that drew him there seemed to him, at first sight, the thwarting, rather than the fulfilment, of his long-cherished hope. Well it is for us to carry all our schemes to God, and to leave them in His hands.

The account of the riot is singularly vivid and lifelike. It reveals a new phase of antagonism to the Gospel, a kind of trades-union demonstration, quite unlike anything that has met us in the Acts. It gives a glimpse into the civic life of a great city, and shows demagogues and mob to be the same in Ephesus as in England. It has many points of interest for the commentator or scholar, and lessons for all. Luke tells the story with a certain dash of covert irony.

We have, first, the protest of the shrine-makers' guild or trades-union, got up by the skilful manipulation of Demetrius. He was evidently an important man in the trade, probably well-to-do. As his speech shows, he knew exactly how to hit the average mind. The small shrines which he and his fellow-craftsmen made were of various materials, from humble pottery to silver, and were intended for 'votaries to dedicate in the temple,' and represented the goddess Artemis sitting in a niche with her lions beside her. Making these was a flourishing industry, and must have employed a large number of men and much capital. Trade was beginning to be slack, and sales were falling off. No doubt there is exaggeration in Demetrius's rhetoric, but the meeting of the craft would not have

been held unless a perceptible effect had been produced by Paul's preaching. Probably Demetrius and the rest were more frightened than hurt; but men are very quick to take alarm when their pockets are threatened.

The speech is a perfect example of how self-interest masquerades in the garb of pure concern for lofty objects, and yet betrays itself. The danger to 'our craft' comes first, and the danger to the 'magnificence' of the goddess second; but the precedence given to the trade is salved over by a 'not only,' which tries to make the religious motive the chief. No doubt Demetrius was a devout worshipper of Artemis, and thought himself influenced by high motives in stirring up the craft. It is natural to be devout or moral or patriotic when it pays to be so. One would not expect a shrine-maker to be easily accessible to the conviction that 'they be no gods which are made with hands.'

Such admixture of zeal for some great cause, with a shrewd eye to profit, is very common, and may deceive us if we are not always watchful. Jehu bragged about his 'zeal for the Lord' when it urged him to secure himself on the throne by murder; and he may have been quite honest in thinking that the impulse was pure, when it was really mingled. How many foremost men in public life everywhere pose as pure patriots, consumed with zeal for national progress, righteousness, etc., when all the while they are chiefly concerned about some private bit of log-rolling of their own! How often in churches there are men professing to be eager for the glory of God, who are, perhaps half-unconsciously, using it as a stalking-horse, behind which they may shoot game for their own larder! A drop of quicksilver oxidises and dims as soon as

exposed to the air. The purest motives get a scum on them quickly unless we constantly keep them clear by communion with God.

Demetrius may teach us another lesson. His opposition to Paul was based on the plain fact that, if Paul's teaching prevailed, no more shrines would be wanted. That was a new ground of opposition to the Gospel, resembled only by the motive for the action of the owners of the slave girl at Philippi; but it is a perennial source of antagonism to it. In our cities especially there are many trades which would be wiped out if Christ's laws of life were universally adopted. So all the purveyors of commodities and pleasures which the Gospel forbids a Christian man to use are arrayed against it. We have to make up our minds to face and fight them. A liquor-seller, for instance, is not likely to look complacently on a religion which would bring his 'trade into disrepute'; and there are other occupations which would be gone if Christ were King, and which therefore, by the instinct of self-preservation, are set against the Gospel, unless, so to speak, its teeth are drawn.

According to one reading, the shouts of the craftsmen which told that Demetrius had touched them in the tenderest part, their pockets, was an invocation, 'Great Diana!' not a profession of faith; and we have a more lively picture of an excited crowd if we adopt the alteration. It is easy to get a mob to yell out a watchword, whether religious or political; and the less they understand it, the louder are they likely to roar. In Athanasius' days the rabble of Constantinople made the city ring with cries, degrading the subtlest questions as to the Trinity, and examples of the same sort have not been wanting nearer home. It is

criminal to bring such incompetent judges into religious or political or social questions, it is cowardly to be influenced by them. ‘The voice of the people’ is not always ‘the voice of God.’ It is better to ‘be in the right with two or three’ than to swell the howl of Diana’s worshippers.

II. A various reading of verse 28 gives an additional particular, which is of course implied in the received text, but makes the narrative more complete and vivid if inserted. It adds that the craftsmen rushed ‘into the street,’ and there raised their wild cry, which naturally ‘filled’ the city with confusion. So the howling mob, growing larger and more excited every minute, swept through Ephesus, and made for the theatre, the common place of assembly.

On their road they seem to have come across two of Paul’s companions, whom they dragged with them. What they meant to do with the two they had probably not asked themselves. A mob has no plans, and its most savage acts are unpremeditated. Passion let loose is almost sure to end in bloodshed, and the lives of Gaius and Aristarchus hung by a thread. A gust of fury storming over the mob, and a hundred hands might have torn them to atoms, and no man have thought himself their murderer.

What a noble contrast to the raging crowd the silent submission, no doubt accompanied by trustful looks to Heaven and unspoken prayers, presents! And how grandly Paul comes out! He had not been found, probably had not been sought for, by the rioters, whose rage was too blind to search for him, but his brave soul could not bear to leave his friends in peril and not plant himself by their sides. So he ‘was minded to enter in unto the people,’ well knowing that

there he had to face more ferocious ‘wild beasts’ than if a cageful of lions had been loosed on him. Faith in God and fellowship with Christ lift a soul above fear of death. The noblest kind of courage is not that born of flesh or temperament, or of the madness of battle, but that which springs from calm trust in and absolute surrender to Christ.

Not only did the disciples restrain Paul as feeling that if the shepherd were smitten the sheep would be scattered, but interested friends started up in an unlikely quarter. The ‘chief of Asia’ or Asiarchs, who sent to dissuade him, ‘were the heads of the imperial political-religious organisation of the province, in the worship of “Rome and the emperors”; and their friendly attitude is a proof both that the spirit of the imperial policy was not as yet hostile to the new teaching, and that the educated classes did not share the hostility of the superstitious vulgar’ (Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 281). It is probable that, in that time of crumbling faith and religious unrest, the people who knew most about the inside of the established worship believed in it least, and in their hearts agreed with Paul that ‘they be no gods which are made with hands.’

So we have in these verses the central picture of calm Christian faith and patient courage, contrasted on the one hand with the ferocity and excitement of heathen fanatical devotees, and on the other with the prudent regard to their own safety of the Asiarchs, who had no such faith in Diana as to lead them to joining the rioters, nor such faith in Paul’s message as to lead them to oppose the tumult, or to stand by his side, but contented themselves with *sending* to warn him. Who can doubt that the courage of the

Christians is infinitely nobler than the fury of the mob or the cowardice of the Asiarchs, kindly as they were? If they were his friends, why did they not do something to shield him? ‘A plague on such backing!’

III. The scene in the theatre, to which Luke returns in verse 32, is described with a touch of scorn for the crowd, who mostly knew not what had brought them together. One section of it kept characteristically cool and sharp-eyed for their own advantage. A number of Jews had mingled in it, probably intending to fan the flame against the Christians, if they could do it safely. As in so many other cases in Acts, common hatred brought Jew and Gentile together, each pocketing for the time his disgust with the other. The Jews saw their opportunity. Half a dozen cool heads, who know what they want, can often sway a mob as they will. Alexander, whom they ‘put forward,’ was no doubt going to make a speech disclaiming for the Jews settled in Ephesus any connection with the obnoxious Paul. We may be very sure that his ‘defence’ was of the former, not of the latter.

But the rioters were in no mood to listen to fine distinctions among the members of a race which they hated so heartily. Paul was a Jew, and this man was a Jew; that was enough. So the roar went up again to Great Diana, and for two long hours the crowd surged and shouted themselves hoarse, Gaius and Aristarchus standing silent all the while and expecting every moment to be their last. The scene reminds one of Baal’s priests shrieking to him on Carmel. It is but too true a representation of the wild orgies which stand for worship in all heathen religions. It is but too lively an example of what must always happen

when excited crowds are ignorantly stirred by appeals to prejudice or self-interest.

The more democratic the form of government under which we live, the more needful is it to distinguish the voice of the people from the voice of the mob, and to beware of exciting, or being governed by, clamour however loud and long.

PARTING COUNSELS

'And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. 29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'—ACTS xx. 22-35.

THIS parting address to the Ephesian elders is perfect in simplicity, pathos, and dignity. Love without weakness and fervent yet restrained self-devotion throb in every line. It is personal without egotism, and soars without effort. It is 'Pauline' through and through, and if Luke or some unknown second-century Christian made it, the world has lost the name of a great genius. In reading it, we have to remember the Apostle's long stay in Ephesus, and his firm conviction that he was

parting for ever from those over whom he had so long watched, and so long loved, as well as guided. Parting words should be tender and solemn, and these are both in the highest degree.

The prominence given to personal references is very marked and equally natural. The whole address down to verse 27 inclusive is of that nature, and the same theme recurs in verse 31, is caught up again in verse 33, and continues thence to the end. That abundance of allusions to himself is characteristic of the Apostle, even in his letters; much more is it to be looked for in such an outpouring of his heart to trusted friends, seen for the last time. Few religious teachers have ever talked so much of themselves as Paul did, and yet been as free as he is from taint of display or self-absorption.

The personal references in verses 22 to 27 turn on two points—his heroic attitude in prospect of trials and possible martyrdom, and his solemn washing his hands of all responsibility for ‘the blood’ of those to whom he had declared all the counsel of God. He looks back, and his conscience witnesses that he has discharged his ministry; he looks forward, and is ready for all that may confront him in still discharging it, even to the bloody end.

Nothing tries a man’s mettle more than impending evil which is equally certain and undefined. Add that the moment of the sword’s falling is unknown, and you have a combination which might shake the firmest nerves. Such a combination fronted Paul now. He told the elders, what we do not otherwise know, that at every halting-place since setting his face towards Jerusalem he had been met by the same prophetic warnings of ‘bonds and afflictions’ waiting for him.

The warnings were vague, and so the more impressive. Fear has a vivid imagination, and anticipates the worst.

Paul was not afraid, but he would not have been human if he had not recognised the short distance for him between a prison and a scaffold. But the prospect did not turn him a hairsbreadth from his course. True, he was 'bound in the spirit,' which may suggest that he was not so much going joyfully as impelled by a constraint felt to be irresistible. But whatever his feelings, his will was iron, and he went calmly forward on the road, though he knew that behind some turn of it lay in wait, like beasts of prey, dangers of unknown kinds.

And what nerved him thus to front death itself without a quiver? The supreme determination to do what Jesus had given him to do. He knew that his Lord had set him a task, and the one thing needful was to accomplish that. We have no such obstacles in our course as Paul had in his, but the same spirit must mark us if we are to do our work. Consciousness of a mission, fixed determination to carry it out, and consequent contempt of hindrances, belong to all noble lives, and especially to true Christian ones. Perils and hardships and possible evils should have no more power to divert us from the path which Christ marks for us than storms or tossing of the ship have to deflect the needle from pointing north.

It is easy to talk heroically when no foes are in sight; but Paul was looking dangers in the eyes, and felt their breath on his cheeks when he spoke. His longing was to 'fulfil his course.' 'With joy' is a weakening addition. It was not 'joy,' but the discharge of duty, which seemed to him infinitely desir-

able. What was aspiration at Miletus became fact when, in his last Epistle, he wrote, 'I have finished my course.'

In verses 25 to 27 the Apostle looks back as well as forward. His anticipation that he was parting for ever from the Ephesian elders was probably mistaken, but it naturally leads him to think of the long ministry among them which was now, as he believed, closed. And his retrospect was very different from what most of us, who are teachers, feel that ours must be. It is a solemn thought that if we let either cowardice or love of ease and the good opinion of men hold us back from speaking out all that we know of God's truth, our hands are reddened with the blood of souls.

We are all apt to get into grooves of favourite thoughts, and to teach but part of the whole Gospel. If we do not seek to widen our minds to take in, and our utterances to give forth, all the will of God as seen by us, our limitations and repetitions will repel some from the truth, who might have been won by a completer presentation of it, and their blood will be required at our hands. None of us can reach to the apprehension, in its full extent and due proportion of its parts, of that great gospel; but we may at least seek to come nearer the ideal completeness of a teacher, and try to remember that we are 'pure from the blood of all men,' only when we have not 'shrunk from declaring all God's counsel.' We are not required to know it completely, but we are required not to shrink from declaring it as far as we know it.

Paul's purpose in this retrospect was not only to vindicate himself, but to suggest to the elders their duty. Therefore he passes immediately to exhortation to them, and a forecast of the future of the

Ephesian Church. ‘Take heed to yourselves.’ The care of one’s own soul comes first. He will be of little use to the Church whose own personal religion is not kept warm and deep. All preachers and teachers and men who influence their fellows need to lay to heart this exhortation, especially in these days when calls to outward service are so multiplied. The neglect of it undermines all real usefulness, and is a worm gnawing at the roots of the vines.

We note also the condensed weightiness of the following exhortation, in which solemn reasons are suggested for obeying it. The divine appointment to office, the inclusion of the ‘bishops’ in the flock, the divine ownership of the flock, and the cost of its purchase, are all focussed on the one point, ‘Take heed to all the flock.’ Of course a comparison with verse 17 shows that *elder* and *bishop* were two designations for one officer; but the question of the primitive organisation of church offices, important as it is, is less important than the great thoughts as to the relation of the Church to God, and as to the dear price at which men have been won to be truly His.

We note the reading in the Revised Version of v. 28 (margin), ‘the flock of the Lord,’ but do not discuss it. The chief thought of the verse is that the Church is God’s flock, and that the death of Jesus has bought it for His, and that negligent under-shepherds are therefore guilty of grievous sin.

The Apostle had premonitions of the future for the Church as well as for himself, and the horizons were dark in both outlooks. He foresaw evils from two quarters, for ‘wolves’ would come from without, and perverse teachers would arise within, drawing the disciples after them and away from the Lord. The

simile of wolves may be an echo of Christ's warning in Matthew vii. 15. How sadly Paul's anticipations were fulfilled the Epistle to the Church in Ephesus (Revelation ii.) shows too clearly. Unslumbering alertness, as of a sentry in front of the enemy, is needed if the slinking onset of the wolf is to be beaten back. Paul points to his own example, and that in no vain-glorious spirit, but to stimulate and also to show how watchfulness is to be carried out. It must be unceasing, patient, tenderly solicitous, and grieving over the falls of others as over personal calamities. If there were more such 'shepherds,' there would be fewer stray sheep.

Anxious forebodings and earnest exhortations naturally end in turning to God and invoking His protecting care. The Apostle's heart runs over in his last words (vs. 32-35). He falls back for himself, in the prospect of having to cease his care of the Church, on the thought that a better Guide will not leave it, and he would comfort the elders as well as himself by the remembrance of God's power to keep them. So Jacob, dying, said, 'I die, but God shall be with you.' So Moses, dying, said, 'The Lord hath said unto me, thou shalt not go over this Jordan. The Lord thy God, He will go before thee.' Not even Paul is indispensable. The under-shepherds die, *the Shepherd* lives, and watches against wolves and dangers. Paul had laid the foundation, and the edifice would not stand unfinished, like some half-reared palace begun by a now dead king. The growth of the Church and of its individual members is sure. It is wrought by God.

His instrument is 'the word of His grace.' Therefore if we would grow, we must use that word. Christian progress is no more possible, if the word of God is not

our food, than is an infant's growth if it refuses milk. That building up or growth or advance (for all three metaphors are used, and mean the same thing) has but one natural end, the entrance of each redeemed soul into its own allotment in the true land of promise, the inheritance of those who are sanctified. If we faithfully use that word which tells of and brings God's grace, that we may grow thereby, He will bring us at last to dwell among those who here have growingly been made saints. He is able to do these things. It is for us to yield to His power, and to observe the conditions on which it will work on us.

Even at the close Paul cannot refrain from personal references. He points to his example of absolute disinterestedness, and with a dramatic gesture holds out 'these hands' to show how they are hardened by work. Such a warning against doing God's work for money would not have been his last word, at a time when all hearts were strung up to the highest pitch, unless the danger had been very real. And it is very real to-day. If once the suspicion of being influenced by greed of gain attaches to a Christian worker, his power ebbs away, and his words lose weight and impetus.

It is that danger which Paul is thinking of when he tells the elders that by 'labouring' they 'ought to support the weak'; for by *weak* he means not the poor, but those imperfect disciples who might be repelled or made to stumble by the sight of greed in an elder. Shepherds who obviously cared more for wool than for the sheep have done as much harm as 'grievous wolves.'

Paul quotes an else unrecorded saying of Christ's which, like a sovereign's seal, confirms the subject's words. It gathers into a sentence the very essence

of Christian morality. It reveals the inmost secret of the blessedness of the giving God. It is foolishness and paradox to the self-centred life of nature. It is blessedly true in the experience of all who, having received the ‘unspeakable gift,’ have thereby been enfranchised into the loftier life in which self is dead, and to which it is delight, kindred with God’s own blessedness, to impart.

A FULFILLED ASPIRATION

‘So that I might finish my course. . . .’—ACTS xx. 24.

‘I have finished my course. . . .’—2 TIM. iv. 7.

I DO not suppose that Paul in prison, and within sight of martyrdom, remembered his words at Ephesus. But the fact that what was aspiration whilst he was in the very thick of his difficulties came to be calm retrospect at the close is to me very beautiful and significant. ‘So that I may finish my course,’ said he wistfully; whilst before him there lay dangers clearly discerned and others that had all the more power over the imagination because they were but dimly discerned—‘Not knowing the things that shall befall me there,’ said he, but knowing this, that ‘bonds and afflictions abide me.’ When a man knows exactly what he has to be afraid of he can face it. When he knows a little corner of it, and also knows that there is a great stretch behind that is unknown, that is a state of things that tries his mettle. Many a man will march up to a battery without a tremor who would not face a hole where a snake lay. And so Paul’s ignorance, as well as Paul’s knowledge, made it very hard for him to say ‘None of these things move me’ if only ‘I might finish my course.’

Now there are in these two passages, thus put together, three points that I touch for a moment. These are, What Paul thought that life chiefly was; what Paul aimed at; and what Paul won thereby.

I. What he thought that life chiefly was.

'That I may finish my course.' Now 'course,' in our modern English, is far too feeble a word to express the Apostle's idea here. It has come to mean with us a quiet sequence or a succession of actions which, taken together, complete a career; but in its original force the English word 'course,' and still more the Greek, of which it is a translation, contain a great deal more than that. If we were to read 'race,' we should get nearer to at least one side of the Apostle's thought. This was the image under which life presented itself to him, as it does to every man that does anything in the world worth doing, whether he be Christian or not—as being not a place for enjoyment, for selfish pursuits, making money, building family, satisfying love, seeking pleasure, or the like; but mainly as being an appointed field for a succession of efforts, all in one direction, and leading progressively to an end. In that image of life as a race, threadbare as it is, there are several grave considerations involved, which it will contribute to the nobleness of our own lives to keep steadily in view.

To begin with, the metaphor regards life as a track or path marked out and to be kept to by us. Paul thought of his life as a racecourse, traced for him by God, and from which it would be perilous and rebellious to diverge. The consciousness of definite duties loomed larger than anything else before him. His first waking thought was, 'What is God's will for me to-day? What stage of the course have I to pass over to-day?' Each moment brought to him an appointed task which at

all hazards he must do. And this elevating, humbling, and bracing ever-present sense of responsibility, not merely to circumstances, but to God, is an indispensable part of any life worth the living, and of any on which a man will ever dare to look back.

'My course.' O brethren! if we carried with us, always present, that solemn, severe sense of all-pervading duty and of obligation laid upon us to pursue faithfully the path that is appointed us, there would be less waste, less selfishness, less to regret, and less that weakens and defiles, in the lives of us all. And blessed be His name! however trivial be our tasks, however narrow our spheres, however secular and commonplace our businesses or trades, we may write upon them, as on all sorts of lives, except weak and selfish ones, this inscription, 'Holiness to the Lord.'

The broad arrow stamped on Crown property gives a certain dignity to whatever bears it, and whatever small duty has the name of God written across it is thereby ennobled. If our days are to be full-fraught with the serenity and purity which it is possible for them to attain, and if we ourselves are to put forth all our powers and make the most of ourselves, we must cultivate the continual sense that life is a course—a series of definite duties marked out for us by God.

Again, the image suggests the strenuous efforts needed for discharge of our appointed tasks. The Apostle, like all men of imaginative and sensitive nature, was accustomed to speak in metaphors, which expressed his fervid convictions more adequately than more abstract expressions would have done. That vigorous figure of a 'course' speaks more strongly of the stress of continual effort than many words. It speaks of the straining muscles, and the intense concentration, and

the forward-flung body of the runner in the arena. Paul says in effect, 'I, for my part, live at high pressure. I get the most that I can out of myself. I do the very best that is in me.' And that is a pattern for us.

There is nothing to be done unless we are contented to live on the stretch. Easygoing lives are always contemptible lives. A man who never does anything except what he can do easily never comes to do anything greater than what he began with, and never does anything worth doing at all. Effort is the law of life in all departments, as we all of us know and practise in regard to our daily business. But what a strange thing it is that we seem to think that our Christian characters can be formed and perfected upon other conditions, and in other fashions, than those by which men make their daily bread or their worldly fortunes!

The direction which effort takes is different in these two regions. The necessity for concentration and vigorous putting into operation of every faculty is far more imperative in the Christian course than in any other form of life.

I believe most earnestly that we grow Christlike, not by effort only, but by faith. But I believe that there is no faith without effort, and that the growth which comes from faith will not be appropriated and made ours without it. And so I preach, without in the least degree feeling that it impinges upon the great central truth that we are cleansed and perfected by the power of God working upon us, the sister truth that we must 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.'

Brethren, unless we are prepared for the dust and heat of the race, we had better not start upon the course. Christian men have an appointed task, and to

do it will take all the effort that they can put forth, and will assuredly demand continuous concentration and the summoning of every faculty to its utmost energy.

Still further, there is another idea that lies in the emblem, and that is that the appointed task which thus demands the whole man in vigorous exercise ought in fact to be, and in its nature is, progressive. Is the Christianity of the average church member and professing Christian a continuous advance? Is to-day better than yesterday? Are former attainments continually being left behind? Does it not seem the bitterest irony to talk about the usual life of a Christian as a course? Did you ever see a squad of raw recruits being drilled in the barrack-yard? The first thing the sergeants do is to teach them the ‘goose-step,’ which consists in lifting up one foot and then the other, *ad infinitum*, and yet always keeping on the same bit of ground. That is the kind of ‘course’ which hosts of so-called Christians content themselves with running—a vast deal of apparent exercise and no advance. They are just at the same spot at which they stood five, ten, or twenty years ago; not a bit wiser, more like Christ, less like the devil and the world; having gained no more mastery over their characteristic evils; falling into precisely the same faults of temper and conduct as they used to do in the far-away past. By what right can *they* talk of running the Christian race? Progress is essential to real Christian life.

II. Turn now to another thought here, and consider what Paul aimed at.

It is a very easy thing for a man to say, ‘I take the discharge of my duty, given to me by Jesus Christ, as

my great purpose in life,' when there is nothing in the way to prevent him from carrying out that purpose. But it is a very different thing when, as was the case with Paul, there lie before him the certainties of affliction and bonds, and the possibilities which very soon consolidated themselves into certainties, of a bloody death and that swiftly. To say *then*, without a quickened pulse or a tremor in the eyelid, or a quiver in the voice, or a falter in the resolution, to say *then*, 'none of these things move me, if only I may do what I was set to do'—that is to be in Christ indeed; and that is the only thing worth living for.

Look how beautifully we see in operation in these heartfelt and few words of the Apostle the power that there is in an absolute devotion to God-enjoined duty, to give a man 'a solemn scorn of ills,' and to lift him high above everything that would bar or hinder his path. Is it not bracing to see any one actuated by such motives as these? And why should they not be motives for us all? The one thing worth our making our aim in life is to accomplish our course.

Now notice that the word in the original here, 'finish,' does not merely mean 'end,' which would be a very poor thing. Time will do that for us all. It will end our course. But an ended course may yet be an unfinished course. And the meaning that the Apostle attaches to the word in both of our texts is not merely to scramble through anyhow, so as to get to the last of it; but to complete, accomplish the course, or, to put away the metaphor, to do all that it was meant by God that he should do.

Now some very early transcriber of the Acts of the Apostles mistook the Apostle's meaning, and thought that he only said that he desired to end his career;

and so, with the best intentions in the world, he inserted, probably on the margin, what he thought was a necessary addition—that unfortunate ‘with joy,’ which appears in our Authorised Version, but has no place in the true text. If we put it in we necessarily limit the meaning of the word ‘finish’ to that low, superficial sense which I have already dismissed. If we leave it out we get a far nobler thought. Paul was not thinking about the joy at the end. What he wanted was to do his work, all of it, right through to the very last. He knew there would be joy, but he does not speak about it. What he wanted, as all faithful men do, was to do the work, and let the joy take care of itself.

And so for all of us, the true anæsthetic or ‘pain-killer’ is that all-dominant sense of obligation and duty which lays hold upon us, and grips us, and makes us, not exactly indifferent to, but very partially conscious of, the sorrows or the hindrances or the pains that may come in our way. You cannot stop an express train by stretching a rope across the line, nor stay the flow of a river with a barrier of straw. And if a man has once yielded himself fully to that great conception of God’s will driving him on through life, and prescribing his path for him, it is neither in sorrow nor in joy to arrest his course. They may roll all the golden apples out of the garden of the Hesperides in his path, and he will not stop to pick one of them up; or Satan may block it with his fiercest flames, and the man will go into them, saying, ‘When I pass through the fires He will be with me.’

III. Lastly, what Paul won thereby.

‘That I *may* finish my course . . . I *have* finished my course’; in the same lofty meaning, not merely *ended*,

though that was true, but ‘completed, accomplished, perfected.’

Now some hyper-sensitive people have thought that it was very strange that the Apostle, who was always preaching the imperfection of all human obedience and service, should, at the end of his life, indulge in such a piece of what they fancy was self-complacent retrospect as to say ‘I have kept the faith; I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course.’ But it was by no means complacent self-righteousness. Of course he did not mean that he looked back upon a career free from faults and flecks and stains. No. There is only one pair of human lips that ever could say, in the full significance of the word, ‘It is finished! . . . I have completed the work which Thou gavest Me to do.’ Jesus Christ’s retrospect of a stainless career, without defect or discordance at any point from the divine ideal, is not repeated in any of His servants’ experiences. But, on the other hand, if a man in the middle of his difficulties and his conflict pulls himself habitually together and says to himself, ‘Nothing shall move me, so that I may complete this bit of my course,’ depend upon it, his effort, his believing effort, will not be in vain; and at the last he will be able to look back on a career which, though stained with many imperfections, and marred with many failures, yet on the whole has realised the divine purpose, though not with absolute completeness, at least sufficiently to enable the faithful servant to feel that all his struggle has not been in vain.

Brethren, no one else can. And oh! how different the two ‘courses’ of the godly man and the worldling look, in their relative importance, when seen from this side, as we are advancing towards them, and from the

other as we look back upon them! Pleasures, escape from pains, ease, comfort, popularity, quiet lives—all these things seem very attractive; and God's will often seems very hard and very repulsive, when we are advancing towards some unwelcome duty. But when we get beyond it and look back, the two careers have changed their characters; and all the joys that could be bought at the price of the smallest neglected duty or the smallest perpetrated sin, dwindle and dwindle and dwindle, and the light is out of them, and they show for what they are—nothings, gilded nothings, painted emptinesses, lies varnished over. And on the other hand, to do right, to discharge the smallest duty, to recognise God's will, and with faithful effort to seek to do it in dependence upon Him, that towers and towers and towers, and there seems to be, as there really is, nothing else worth living for.

So let us live with the continual remembrance in our minds that all which we do has to be passed in review by us once more, from another standpoint, and with another illumination falling upon it. And be sure of this, that the one thing worth looking back upon, and possible to be looked back upon with peace and quietness, is the humble, faithful, continual discharge of our appointed tasks for the dear Lord's sake. If you and I, whilst work and troubles last, do truly say, 'None of these things move me, so that I *might* finish my course,' we too, with all our weaknesses, may be able to say at the last, 'Thanks be to God! I *have* finished my course.'

PARTING WORDS¹

'And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace. . . .
—ACTS xx. 32.

I MAY be pardoned if my remarks now should assume somewhat of a more personal character than is my wont. I desire to speak mainly to my own friends, the members of my own congregation; and other friends who have come to give me a parting 'God-speed' will forgive me if my observations have a more special bearing on those with whom I am more immediately connected.

The Apostle whose words I have taken for my text was leaving, as he supposed, for the last time, the representatives of the Church in Ephesus, to whom he had been painting in very sombre colours the dangers of the future and his own forebodings and warnings. Exhortations, prophecies of evil, expressions of anxious solicitude, motions of Christian affection, all culminate in this parting utterance. High above them all rises the thought of the present God, and of the mighty word which in itself, in the absence of all human teachers, had power to 'build them up, and to give them an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified.'

If we think of that Church in Ephesus, this brave confidence of the Apostle's becomes yet more remarkable. They were set in the midst of a focus of heathen superstition, from which they themselves had only recently been rescued. Their knowledge was little, they had no Apostolic teacher to be present with them; they were left alone there to battle with the evils of that corrupt society in which they dwelt. And yet Paul leaves them—'sheep in the midst of wolves,' with a very imperfect Christianity, with no Bible, with no teachers—in the sure confidence that no harm will come to

¹ Preached prior to a long absence in Australia.

them, because God is with them, and the ‘word of His grace’ is enough.

And that is the feeling, dear brethren, with which I now look you in the face for the last time for a little while. I desire that you and I should together share the conviction that each of us is safe because God and the ‘word of His grace’ will go and remain with us.

I. So then, first of all, let me point you to the one source of security and enlightenment for the Church and for the individual.

We are not to separate between God and the ‘word of His grace,’ but rather to suppose that the way by which the Apostle conceived of God as working for the blessing and the guardianship of that little community in Ephesus was mainly, though not exclusively, through that which he here designates ‘the word of His grace.’ We are not to forget the ever-abiding presence of the indwelling Spirit who guards and keeps the life of the individual and of the community. But what is in the Apostle’s mind here is the objective revelation, the actual spoken word (not yet written) which had its origin in God’s condescending love, and had for its contents, mainly, the setting forth of that love. Or to put it into other words, the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, with all the great truths that cluster round and are evolved from it, is the all-sufficient source of enlightenment and security for individuals and for Churches. And whosoever will rightly use and faithfully keep that great word, no evil shall befall him, nor shall he ever make shipwreck of the faith. It is ‘able to build you up,’ says Paul. In God’s Gospel, in the truth concerning Jesus Christ the divine Redeemer, in the principles that flow from that Cross and Passion, and that risen life and that ascension

to God, there is all that men need, all that they want for life, all that they want for godliness. The basis of their creed, the sufficient guide for their conduct, the formative powers that will shape into beauty and nobleness their characters, all lie in the germ in this message, ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.’ Whoever keeps that in mind and memory, ruminates upon it till it becomes the nourishment of his soul, meditates on it till the precepts and the promises and the principles that are enwrapped in it unfold themselves before Him, needs none other guide for life, none other solace in sorrow, none other anchor of hope, none other stay in trial and in death. ‘I commend you to God and the word of His grace,’ which is a storehouse full of all that we need for life and for godliness. Whoever has it is like a landowner who has a quarry on his estate, from which at will he can dig stones to build his house. If you truly possess and faithfully adhere to this Gospel, you have enough.

Remember that these believers to whom Paul thus spoke had no New Testament, and most of them, I dare say, could not read the Old. There were no written Gospels in existence. The greater part of the New Testament was not written; what was written was in the shape of two or three letters that belonged to Churches in another part of the world altogether. It was to the spoken word that he commended them. How much more securely may we trust one another to that permanent record of the divine revelation which we have here in the pages of Scripture!

As for the individual, so for the Church, that written word is the guarantee for its purity and immortality. Christianity is the only religion that has ever passed through periods of decadence and purified itself again,

They used to say that Thames water was the best to put on shipboard because, after it became putrid, it cleared itself and became sweet again. I do not know anything about whether that is true or not, but I know that it is true about Christianity. Over and over again it has rotted, and over and over again it has cleared itself, and it has always been by the one process. Men have gone back to the word and laid hold again of it in its simple omnipotence, and so a decadent Christianity has sprung up again into purity and power. The word of God, the principles of the revelation contained in Christ and recorded for ever in this New Testament, are the guarantee of the Church's immortality and of the Church's purity. This man and that man may fall away, provinces may be lost from the empire for a while, standards of rebellion and heresy may be lifted, but 'the foundation of God standeth sure,' and whoever will hark back again and dig down through the rubbish of human buildings to the living Rock will build secure and dwell at peace. If all our churches were pulverised to-morrow, and every formal creed of Christendom were torn in pieces, and all the institutions of the Church were annihilated—if there was a New Testament left they would all be built up again. 'I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace.'

II. Secondly, notice the possible benefit of the silencing of the *human voice*.

Paul puts together his absence and the power of the word. 'Now I know that you will see my face no more'—'I commend you to God.' That is to say, it is often a good thing that the voice of man may be hushed in order that the sweeter and deeper music of the word of God, sounding from no human lips, may reach our hearts. Of course I am not going to

depreciate preachers and books and religious literature and the thought and the acts of good and wise men who have been interpreters of God's meaning and will to their brethren, but the human ministration of the divine word, like every other help to knowing God, may become a hindrance instead of a help; and in all such helps there is a tendency, unless there be continual jealous watchfulness on the part of those who minister them, and on the part of those who use them, to assert themselves instead of leading to God, and to become not mirrors in which we may behold God, but obscuring *media* which come between us and Him. This danger belongs to the great ordinance and office of the Christian ministry, large as its blessings are, just as it belongs to all other offices which are appointed for the purpose of bringing men to God. We may make them ladders or we may make them barriers; we may climb by them or we may remain in them. We may look at the colours on the painted glass until we do not see or think of the light which strikes through the colours.

So it is often a good thing that a human voice which speaks the divine word, should be silenced; just as it is often a good thing that other helps and props should be taken away. No man ever leans all his weight upon God's arm until every other crutch on which he used to lean has been knocked from him.

And therefore, dear brethren, applying these plain things to ourselves, may I not say that it may and should be the result of my temporary absence from you that some of you should be driven to a more first-hand acquaintance with God and with His word? I, like all Christian ministers, have of course my favourite ways of looking at truth, limitations of temperament, and idiosyncrasies of various sorts, which colour the repre-

sentations that I make of God's great word. All the river cannot run through any pipe; and what does run is sure to taste somewhat of the soil through which it runs. And for some of you, after thirty years of hearing my way of putting things—and I have long since told you all that I have got to say—it will be a good thing to have some one else to speak to you, who will come with other aspects of that great Truth, and look at it from other angles and reflect other hues of its perfect whiteness. So partly because of these limitations of mine, partly because you have grown so accustomed to my voice that the things that I say do not produce half as much effect on many of you as if I were saying them to somebody else, or somebody else were saying them to you, and partly because the affection, born of so many years of united worship, for which in many respects I am your debtor, may lead you to look at the vessel rather than the treasure, do you not think it may be a means of blessing and help to this congregation that I should step aside for a little while and some one else should stand here, and you should be driven to make acquaintance with 'God and the word of His grace' a little more for yourselves? What does it matter though you do not have my sermons? You have your Bibles and you have God's Spirit. And if my silence shall lead any of you to prize and to use *these* more than you have done, then my silence will have done a great deal more than my speech. Ministers are like doctors, the test of their success is that they are not needed any more. And when we can say, 'They can stand without us, and they do not need us,' that is the crown of our ministry.

III. Thirdly, notice the best expression of Christian solicitude and affection.

'I commend you,' says Paul, 'to God, and to the word of His grace.' If we may venture upon a very literal translation of the word, it is, 'I lay you down beside God.' That is beautiful, is it not? Here had Paul been carrying the Ephesian Church on his back for a long time now. He had many cares about them, many forebodings as to their future, knowing very well that after his departure grievous wolves were going to enter in. He says, 'I cannot carry the load any longer; here I lay it down at the Throne, beneath those pure Eyes, and that gentle and strong Hand.' For to command them to God is in fact a prayer casting the care which Paul could no longer exercise, upon Him.

And that is the highest expression of, as it is the only soothing for, manly Christian solicitude and affection. Of course you and I, looking forward to these six months of absence, have all of us our anxieties about what may be the issue. I may feel afraid lest there should be flagging here, lest good work should be done a little more languidly, lest there should be a beggarly account of empty pews many a time, lest the bonds of Christian union here should be loosened, and when I come back I may find it hard work to reknit them. All these thoughts must be in the mind of a true man who has put most of his life, and as much of himself as during that period he could command, into his work. What then? 'I commend you to God.' You may have your thoughts and anxieties as well as I have mine. Dear brethren, let us make an end of solicitude and turn it into petition and bring one another to God, and leave one another there.

This 'commanding,' as it is the highest expression of
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Christian solicitude, so it is the highest and most natural expression of Christian affection. I am not going to do what is so easy to do—bring tears at such a moment. I do not purpose to speak of the depth, the sacredness of the bond that unites a great many of us together. I think we can take that for granted without saying any more about it. But, dear brethren, I do want to pledge you and myself to this, that our solicitude and our affection should find voice in prayer, and that when we are parted we may be united, because the eyes of both are turned to the one Throne. There is a reality in prayer. Do you pray for me, as I will for you, when we are far apart. And as the vapour that rises from the southern seas where I go may fall in moisture, refreshing these northern lands, so what rises on one side of the world from believing hearts in loving prayers may fall upon the other in the rain of a divine blessing. ‘I commend you to God, and the word of His grace.’

IV. Lastly, notice the parting counsels involved in the commendation.

If it be true that God and His Word are the source of all security and enlightenment, and are so, apart altogether from human agencies, then to commend these brethren to God was exhortation as well as prayer, and implied pointing them to the one source of security that they might cling to that source. I am going to give no advices about little matters of church order and congregational prosperity. These will all come right, if the two main exhortations that are involved in this text are laid to heart; and if they are not laid to heart, then I do not care one rush about the smaller things, of full pews and prosperous subscription lists and Christian work. These are secondary,

and they will be consequent if you take these two advices that are couched in my text:—

(a) ‘Cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart,’ as the limpet does to the rock. Cling to Jesus Christ, the revelation of God’s grace. And how do we cling to Him? What is the cement of souls? Love and trust; and whoever exercises these in reference to Jesus Christ is built into Him, and belongs to Him, and has a vital unity knitting him with that Lord. Cleave to Christ, brother, by faith and love, by communion and prayer, and by practical conformity of life. For remember that the union which is effected by faith can be broken by sin, and that there will be no reality in our union to Jesus unless it is manifested and perpetuated by righteousness of conduct and character. Two smoothly-ground pieces of glass pressed together will adhere. If there be a speck of sand, microscopic in dimensions, between the two, they will fall apart; and if you let tiny grains of sin come between you and your Master, it is delusion to speak of being knit to Him by faith and love. Keep near Jesus Christ and you will be safe.

(b) Cleave to ‘the word of His grace.’ Try to understand its teachings better; study your Bibles with more earnestness; believe more fully than you have ever done that in that great Gospel there lie every truth that we need and guidance in all circumstances. Bring the principles of Christianity into your daily life; walk by the light of them; and live in the radiance of a present God. And then all these other matters which I have spoken of, which are important, highly important but secondary, will come right.

Many of you, dear brethren, have listened to my voice for long years, and have not done the one thing

for which I preach—viz. set your faith, as sinful men, on the great atoning Sacrifice and Incarnate Lord. I beseech you let my last word go deeper than its predecessors, and yield yourselves to God in Christ, bringing all your weakness and all your sin to Him, and trusting yourselves wholly and utterly to His sacrifice and life.

'I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,' and beseech you 'that, whether I come to see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.'

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING

'... It is more blessed to give than to receive.'—ACTS xx. 35.

How 'many other things Jesus did' and said 'which are not written in this book'! Here is one precious unrecorded word, which was floating down to the ocean of oblivion when Paul drew it to shore and so enriched the world. There is, however, a saying recorded, which is essentially parallel in content though differing in garb, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' It is tempting to think that the text gives a glimpse into the deep fountains of the pure blessedness of Jesus Himself, and was a transcript of His own human experience. It helps us to understand how the Man of Sorrows could give as a legacy to His followers 'My joy,' and could speak of it as abiding and full.

I. The reasons on which this saying rests.

It is based not only on the fact that the act of giving

has in it a sense of power and of superiority, and that the act of receiving may have a painful consciousness of obligation, though a cynic might endorse it on that ground, but on a truth far deeper than these, that there is a pure and godlike joy in making others blessed.

The foundation on which the axiom rests is that giving is the result of love and self-sacrifice. Whenever they are not found, the giving is not the giving which 'blesses him that gives.' If you give with some *arrière pensée* of what you will get by it, or for the sake of putting some one under obligation, or indifferently as a matter of compulsion or routine, if with your alms there be contempt to which pity is ever near akin, then these are not examples of the giving on which Christ pronounced His benediction. But where the heart is full of deep, real love, and where that love expresses itself by a cheerful act of self-sacrifice, then there is felt a glow of calm blessedness far above the base and greedy joys of self-centred souls who delight only in keeping their possessions, or in using them for themselves. It comes not merely from contemplating the relief or happiness in others of which our gifts may have been the source, but from the working in our own hearts of these two godlike emotions. To be delivered from making myself my great object, and to be delivered from the undue value set upon having and keeping our possessions, are the twin factors of true blessedness. It is heaven on earth to love and to give oneself away.

Then again, the highest joy and noblest use of all our possessions is found in imparting them.

True as to this world's goods.

The old epitaph is profoundly true, which puts into the dead lips the declaration: 'What I kept I lost.

What I gave I kept.' Better to learn that and act on it while living!

True as to truth, and knowledge.

True as to the Gospel of the grace of God.

II. The great example in God of the blessedness of giving.

God gives—gives only—gives always—and He in giving has joy, blessedness. He would not be ‘the ever-blessed God’ unless He were ‘the giving God.’ Creation we are perhaps scarcely warranted in affirming to be a necessity to the divine nature, and we run on perilous heights of speculation when we speak of it as contributing to His blessedness; but this at least we may say, that He, in the deep words of the Psalmist, ‘delights in mercy.’ Before creation was realised in time, the divine Idea of it was eternal, inseparable from His being, and therefore from everlasting He ‘rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men.’

The light and glory thus thrown on His relation to us.

He gives. He does not exact until He has given. He gives what He requires. The requirement is made in love and is itself a ‘grace given,’ for it permits to God’s creatures, in their relation to Him, some feeble portion and shadow of the blessedness which He possesses, by permitting them to bring offerings to His throne, and so to have the joy of giving to Him what He has given to them. ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.’ Then how this thought puts an end to all manner of slavish notions about God’s commands and demands, and about worship, and about merits, or winning heaven by our own works.

Notice that the same emotions which we have found to make the blessedness of giving are those which

come into play in the act of receiving spiritual blessings. We receive the Gospel by faith, which assuredly has in it love and self-sacrifice.

Having thus the great Example of all giving in heaven, and the shadow and reflex of that example in our relations to Him on earth, we are thereby fitted for the exemplification of it in our relation to men. To give, not to get, is to be our work, to love, to sacrifice ourselves.

This axiom should regulate Christians' relation to the world, and to each other, in every way. It should shape the Christian use of money. It should shape our use of all which we have.

DRAWING NEARER TO THE STORM

'And it came to pass, that, after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara : 2. And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. 4. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. 5. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. 7. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. 8. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. 10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. 15. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.'—ACTS xxi. 1-15.

PAUL'S heroic persistency in disregarding the warnings of 'bonds and afflictions' which were pealed into his

ears in every city, is the main point of interest in this section. But the vivid narrative abounds with details which fill it with life and colour. We may gather it all round three points—the voyage, Tyre, and Cæsarea.

I. The log of the voyage, as given in verses 1-3, shows the leisurely way of navigation in those days and in that sea. Obviously the coaster tied up or anchored in port at night. Running down the coast from Miletus, they stayed overnight, first at the small island of Coos, then stretched across the next day to Rhodes, and on the third struck back to the mainland at Patara, from which, according to one reading, they ran along the coast a little further east to Myra, the usual port of departure for Syria. Ramsay explains that the prevalent favourable wind for a vessel bound for Syria blows steadily in early morning, and dies down towards nightfall, so that there would have been no use in keeping at sea after sundown.

At Patara (or Myra) Paul and his party had to tranship, for their vessel was probably of small tonnage, and only fit to run along the coast. In either port they would have no difficulty in finding some merchantman to take them across to Syria. Accordingly they shifted into one bound for Tyre, and apparently ready to sail. The second part of their voyage took them right out to sea, and their course lay to the west, and then to the south of Cyprus, which Luke mentions as if to remind us of Paul's visit there when he was beginning his missionary work. How much had passed since that day at Paphos (which they might have sighted from the deck)! He had left Paphos with Barnabas and John Mark—where were they? He had sailed away from Cyprus to carry the Gospel among Gentiles; he sails past it, accompanied by a group of

these whom he had won for Christ. There he had begun his career; now the omens indicated that possibly its end was near. Many a thought would be in his mind as he looked out over the blue waters and saw the glittering roofs and groves of Paphos.

Tyre was the first port of call, and there the cargo was to be landed. The travellers had to wait till that was done, and probably another one shipped. The seven days' stay is best understood as due to that cause; for we find that Paul re-embarked in the same ship, and went in her as far as Ptolemais, at all events, perhaps to Caesarea.

We note that no brethren are mentioned as having been met at any of the ports of call, and no evangelistic work as having been done in them. The party were simple passengers, who had to shape their movements to suit the convenience of the master of the vessel, and were only in port at night, and off again next morning early. No doubt the leisure at sea was as restorative to them as it often is to jaded workers now.

II. Tyre was a busy seaport then, and in its large population the few disciples would make but little show. They had to be sought out before they were 'found.' One can feel how eagerly the travellers would search, and how thankfully they would find themselves again among congenial souls. Since Miletus they had had no Christian communion, and the sailors in such a ship as theirs would not be exactly kindred spirits. So that week in Tyre would be a blessed break in the voyage. We hear nothing of visiting the synagogue, nor of preaching to the non-Christian population, nor of instruction to the little Church.

The whole interest of the stay at Tyre is, for Luke, centred on the fact that here too the same message

which had met Paul everywhere was repeated to him. It was 'through the Spirit.' Then was Paul flying in the face of divine prohibitions when he held on his way in spite of all that could be said? Certainly not. We have to bring common sense to bear on the interpretation of the words in verse 4, and must suppose that what came from 'the Spirit' was the prediction of persecutions waiting Paul, and that the exhortation to avoid these by keeping clear of Jerusalem was the voice of human affection only. Such a blending of clear insight and of mistaken deductions from it is no strange experience.

No word is said as to the effect of the Tyrian Christians' dissuasion. It had none. Luke mentions it in order to show how continuous was the repetition of the same note, and his silence as to the manner of its reception is eloquent. The parting scene at Tyre is like, and yet very unlike, that at Miletus. In both the Christians accompany Paul to the beach, in both they kneel down and pray. It would scarcely have been a Christian parting without that. In both loving farewells are said, and perhaps waved when words could no longer be heard. But at Tyre, where there were no bonds of old comradeship nor of affection to a spiritual father, there was none of the yearning, clinging love that could not bear to part, none of the hanging on Paul's neck, none of the deep sorrow of final separation. The delicate shades of difference in two scenes so similar tell of the hand of an eye-witness. The touch that 'all' the Tyrian Christians went down to the beach, and took their wives and children with them, suggests that they can have been but a small community, and so confirms the hint given by the use of the word 'found' in verse 4.

III. The vessel ran down the coast to Ptolemais where one day's stop was made, probably to land and ship cargo, if, as is possible, the further journey to Caesarea was by sea. But it may have been by land; the narrative is silent on that point. At Ptolemais, as at Tyre, there was a little company of disciples, the brevity of the stay with whom, contrasted with the long halt in Caesarea, rather favours the supposition that the ship's convenience ruled the Apostle's movements till he reached the latter place. There he found a haven of rest, and, surrounded by loving friends, no wonder that the burdened Apostle lingered there before plunging into the storm of which he had had so many warnings.

The eager haste of the earlier part of the journey, contrasted with the delay in Caesarea at the threshold of his goal, is explained by supposing that at the beginning Paul's one wish had been to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast, and that at Caesarea he found that, thanks to his earlier haste and his good passages, he had a margin to spare. He did not wish to get to the Holy City much before the Feast.

Two things only are told as occurring in Caesarea—the intercourse with Philip and the renewed warnings about going to Jerusalem. Apparently Philip had been in Caesarea ever since we last heard of him (chap. viii.). He had brought his family there, and settled down in the headquarters of Roman government. He had been used by Christ to carry the Gospel to men outside the Covenant, and for a time it seemed as if he was to be the messenger to the Gentiles; but that mission soon ended, and the honour and toil fell to another. But neither did Philip envy Paul, nor did Paul avoid Philip. The Master has the right to settle

what each slave has to do, and whether He sets him to high or low office, it matters not.

Philip might have been contemptuous and jealous of the younger man, who had been nobody when he was chosen as one of the Seven, but had so far outrun him now. But no paltry personal feeling marred the Christian intercourse of the two, and we can imagine how much each had to tell the other, with perhaps Cornelius for a third in company, during the considerably extended stay in Cæsarea. No doubt Luke too made good use of the opportunity of increasing his knowledge of the first days, and probably derived much of the material for the first chapters of Acts from Philip, either then or at his subsequent longer residence in the same city.

We have heard of the prophet Agabus before (chap. xi. 28). Why he is introduced here, as if a stranger, we cannot tell, and it is useless to guess, and absurd to sniff suspicion of genuineness in the peculiarity. His prophecy is more definite than any that preceded it. That is God's way. He makes things clearer as we go on, and warnings more emphatic as danger approaches. The source of the 'afflictions' was now for the first time declared, and the shape which they would take. Jews would deliver Paul to Gentiles, as they had delivered Paul's Master.

But there the curtain falls. What would the Gentiles do with him? That remained unrevealed. Half the tragedy was shown, and then darkness covered the rest. That was more trying to nerves and courage than full disclosure to the very end would have been. Imagination had just enough to work on, and was stimulated to shape out all sorts of horrors. Similarly incomplete and testing to faith are the glimpses of the

future which we get in our own lives. We see but a little way ahead, and then the road takes a sharp turn, and we fancy dreadful shapes hiding round the corner.

Paul's courage was unmoved both by Agabus's incomplete prophecy and by the tearful implorings of his companions and of the Cæsarean Christians. His pathetic words to them are misunderstood if we take 'break my heart' in the modern sense of that phrase, for it really means 'to melt away my resolution,' and shows that Paul felt that the passionate grief of his brethren was beginning to do what no fear for himself could do—shake even his steadfast purpose. No more lovely blending of melting tenderness and iron determination has ever been put into words than that cry of his, followed by the great utterance which proclaimed his readiness to bear all things, even death itself, for 'the name of the Lord Jesus.' What kindled and fed that noble flame of self-devotion? The love of Jesus Christ, built on the sense that He had redeemed the soul of His servant, and had thereby bought him for His own.

If we feel that we have been 'bought with a price,' we too, in our small spheres, shall be filled with that ennobling passion of devoted love which will not count life dear if He calls us to give it up. Let us learn from Paul how to blend the utmost gentleness and tender responsiveness to all love with fixed determination to glorify the Name. A strong will and a loving heart make a marvellously beautiful combination, and should both abide in every Christian.

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

'... We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.'—ACTS xxi. 8.

THE life of this Philip, as recorded, is a very remarkable one. It is divided into two unequal halves: one full of conspicuous service, one passed in absolute obscurity. Like the moon in its second quarter, part of the disc is shining silver and the rest is invisible. Let us put together the notices of him.

He bears a name which makes it probable that he was not a Palestinian Jew, but one of the many who, of Jewish descent, had lived in Gentile lands and contracted Gentile habits and associations. We first hear of him as one of the Seven who were chosen by the Church, at the suggestion of the Apostles, in order to meet the grumbling of that section of the Church, who were called 'Hellenists,' about their people being neglected in the distribution of alms. He stands in that list next to Stephen, who was obviously the leader. Then after Stephen's persecution, he flies from Jerusalem, like the rest of the Church, and comes down to Samaria and preaches there. He did that because circumstances drove him; he had become one of the Seven because his brethren appointed him, but his next step was in obedience to a specific command of Christ. He went and preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, and then he was borne away from the new convert, and after the Spirit had put him down at Ashdod he had to tramp all the way up the Palestinian coast, left to the guidance of his own wits, until he came to Cæsarea. There he remained for twenty years; and we do not hear a word about him in all that time. But at last Paul and his companions, hurrying to keep the

Feast at Jerusalem, found that they had a little time to spare when they reached Cæsarea, and so they came to 'the house of Philip the evangelist,' whom we last heard of twenty years before, and spent 'many days' with him. That is the final glimpse that we have of Philip.

Now let us try to gather two or three plain lessons, especially those which depend on that remarkable contrast between the first and the second periods of this man's life. There is, first, a brief space of brilliant service, and then there are long years of obscure toil.

I. The brief space of brilliant service.

The Church was in a state of agitation, and there was murmuring going on because, as I have already said, a section of it thought that their poor were unfairly dealt with by the native-born Jews in the Church. And so the Apostles said: 'What is the use of your squabbling thus? Pick out any seven that you like, of the class that considers itself aggrieved, and we will put the distribution of these eleemosynary grants into their hands. That will surely stop your mouths. Do you choose whom you please, and we will confirm your choice.' So the Church selected seven brethren, all apparently belonging to the 'Greecians' or Greek-speaking Jews, as the Apostles had directed that they should be, and one of them, not a Jew by birth, but a 'proselyte of Antioch.' These men's partialities would all be in favour of the class to which they belonged, and to secure fair play for which they were elected by it.

Now these seven are never called 'deacons' in the New Testament, though it is supposed that they were the first holders of that office. It is instructive to note how their office came into existence. It was created by

the Apostles, simply as the handiest way of getting over a difficulty. Is that the notion of Church organisation that prevails among some of our brethren who believe that organisation is everything, and that unless a Church has the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, it is not worth calling a Church at all? The plain fact is that the Church at the beginning had no organisation. What organisation it had grew up as circumstances required. The only two laws which governed organisation were, first, ‘One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren’; and second, ‘When the Spirit of the Lord is come upon thee, thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee.’ Thus these seven were appointed to deal with a temporary difficulty and to distribute alms when necessary; and their office dropped when it was no longer required, as was probably the case when, very soon after, the Jerusalem Church was scattered. Then, by degrees, came elders and deacons. People fancy that there is but one rigid, unalterable type of Church organisation, when the reality is that it is fluent and flexible, and that the primitive Church never was meant to be the pattern according to which, in detail, and specifically, other Churches in different circumstances should be constituted. There are great principles which no organisation must break, but if these be kept, the form is a matter of convenience.

That is the first lesson that I take out of this story. Although it has not much to do with Philip himself, still it is worth saying in these days when a particular organisation of the Church is supposed to be essential to Christian fellowship, and we Nonconformists, who have not the ‘orders’ that some of our brethren seem to think indispensable, are by a considerable school unchurched, because we are without

them. But the primitive Church also was without them.

Still further and more important for us, in these brief years of brilliant service I note the spontaneous impulse which sets a Christian man to do Christian work. It was his brethren that picked out Philip, and said, 'Now go and distribute alms,' but his brethren had nothing to do with his next step. He was driven by circumstances out of Jerusalem, and he found himself in Samaria, and perhaps he remembered how Jesus Christ had said, on the day when He went up into Heaven, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.' But whether he remembered that or not, he was here in Samaria, amongst the ancestral enemies of his nation. Nobody told him to preach when he went to Samaria. He had no commission from the Apostles to do so. He did not hold any office in the Church, except that which, according to the Apostles' intention in establishing it, ought to have stopped his mouth from preaching. For they said, when they appointed these seven, 'Let *them* serve tables, and we will give ourselves to the ministry of the word.' But Jesus Christ has a way of upsetting men's restrictions as to the functions of His servants. And so Philip, without a commission, and with many prejudices to stop his mouth, was the first to break through the limitations which confined the message of salvation to the Jews. Because he found himself in Samaria, and they needed Christ there, he did not wait for Peter and James and John to lay their hands upon his head, and say, 'Now you are entitled to speak about Him'; he did not wait for any appointment, but yielded to his own heart, a heart that was full of Jesus Christ, and

must speak about Him ; and he proclaimed the Gospel in that city.

So he has the noble distinction of being the very first Christian man who put a bold foot across the boundary of Judaism, and showed a light to men that were in darkness beyond. Remember he did it as a simple private Christian ; uncalled, uncommissioned, unordained by anybody ; and he did it because he could not help it, and he never thought to himself, ‘I am doing a daring, new thing.’ It seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should preach in Samaria. So it would be to us, if we were Christians with the depth of faith and of personal experience which this man had.

There is another lesson that I take from these first busy years of Philip’s service. Christ provides wider spheres for men who have been faithful in narrower ones. It was because he had ‘won his spurs,’ if I may so say, in Samaria, and proved the stuff he was made of, that the angel of the Lord came and said to Philip, ‘Go down on the road to Gaza, which is desert. Do not ask now what you are to do when you get there. Go !’ So with his sealed orders he went. No doubt he thought to himself, ‘Strange that I should be taken from this prosperous work in Samaria, and sent to a desert road, where there is not a single human being !’ But he went ; and when he struck the point of junction of the road from Samaria with that from Jerusalem, looked about to discover what he had been sent there for. The only thing in sight was one chariot, and he said to himself, ‘Ah, that is it,’ and he drew near to the chariot, and heard the occupant reading aloud Isaiah’s great prophecy. The Ethiopian chamberlain was probably not very familiar with the Greek trans-

lation of the Old Testament, which he seems to have been using and, as poor readers often do, helped his comprehension by speaking the words he sees on the page. Philip knew at once that here was the object of his mission, and so 'joined himself to the chariot,' and set himself to his work.

So Christ chooses His agents for further work from those who, out of their own spontaneous love of Him, have done what lay at their hands. 'To him that hath shall be given.' If you are ambitious of a wider sphere, be sure that you fill your narrow one. It will widen quite fast enough for your capacities.

II. Now let me say a word about the long years of obscurity.

Philip went down to Cæsarea, and, as I said, he drops out of the story for twenty years. I wonder why it was that when Jesus Christ desired that Cornelius, who lived in Cæsarea, should hear the gospel, He did not direct him to Philip, who also was in Cæsarea, but bid him send all the way to Joppa to bring Peter thence? I wonder why it was that when Barnabas at Antioch turned his face northwards to seek for young Saul at Tarsus, he never dreamed of turning southwards to call out Philip from Cæsarea? I wonder how it came to pass that this man, who at one time looked as if he was going to be the leader in the extension of the Church to the Gentiles, and who, as a matter of fact, was the first, not only in Samaria but on the desert road, to press beyond the narrow bounds of Judaism, was passed over in the further stages by Jesus, and why his brethren passed him over, and left him there all these years in Cæsarea, whilst there was so much going on that was the continuation and development of the very movement that he had begun. We do not know why, and it

is useless to try to speculate, but we may learn lessons from the fact.

Here is a beautiful instance of the contented acceptance of a lot very much less conspicuous, very much less brilliant, than the early beginnings had seemed to promise. I suppose that there are very few of us but have had, back in the far-away past, moments when we seemed to have opening out before us great prospects of service which have never been realised; and the remembrance of the brief moments of dawning splendour is very apt to make the rest of the life look grey and dull, and common things flat, and to make us sour. We look back and we think, ‘Ah, the gates were opened for me then, but how they have slammed to since! It is hard for me to go on in this lowly condition, and this eclipsed state into which I have been brought, without feeling how different it might have been if those early days had only continued.’ Well, for Philip it was enough that Jesus Christ sent him to the eunuch and did not send him to Cornelius. He took the position that his Master put him in and worked away therein.

And there is a further lesson for us, who, for the most part, have to lead obscure lives. For there was in Philip not only a contented acceptance of an obscure life, but there was a diligent doing of obscure work. Did you notice that one significant little word in the clause that I have taken for my text: ‘We entered into the house of Philip *the evangelist*, which was one of the seven’? Luke does not forget Philip’s former office, but he dwells rather on what his other office was, twenty years afterwards. He was ‘an evangelist’ now, although the evangelistic work was being done in a very quiet corner, and nobody was paying much

attention to it. Time was when he had a great statesman to listen to his words. Time was when a whole city was moved by his teaching. Time was when it looked as if he was going to do the work that Paul did. But all these visions were shattered, and he was left to toil for twenty long years in that obscure corner, and not a soul knew anything about his work except the people to whom it was directed and the four unmarried girls at home whom his example had helped to bring to Jesus Christ, and who were 'prophetesses.' At the end of the twenty years he is 'Philip the evangelist.'

There is patient perseverance at unrecompensed, unrecorded, and unnoticed work. 'Great' and 'small' have nothing to do with the work of Christian people. It does not matter who knows our work or who does not know it, the thing is that *He* knows it. Now the most of us have to do absolutely unnoticed Christian service. Those of us who are in positions like mine have a little more notoriety—and it is no blessing—and a year or two after a man's voice ceases to sound from a pulpit he is forgotten. What does it matter? 'Surely I will never forget any of their works.' And in these advertising days, when publicity seems to be the great good that people in so many cases seek after, and no one is contented to do his little bit of work unless he gets reported in the columns of the newspapers, we may all take example from the behaviour of Philip, and remember the man who began so brilliantly, and for twenty years was hidden, and was 'the evangelist' all the time.

III. Now, there is one last lesson that I would draw, and that is the ultimate recognition of the work and the joyful meeting of the workers.

I think it is very beautiful to see that when Paul

entered Philip's house he came into a congenial atmosphere; and although he had been hurrying, out of breath as it were, all the way from Corinth to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast, he slowed off at once; partly, no doubt, because he found that he was in time, and partly, no doubt, that he felt the congeniality of the society that he met.

So there was no envy in Philip's heart of the younger brother that had so outrun him. He was quite content to share the fate of pioneers, and rejoiced in the junior who had entered into his labour. 'One soweth and another reapeth'; he was prepared for that, and rejoiced to hear about what the Lord had done by his brother, though once he had thought it might have been done by him. How they would talk! How much there would be to tell! How glad the old man would be at the younger man's success!

And there was one sitting by who did not say very much, but had his ears wide open, and his name was Luke. In Philip's long, confidential conversations he no doubt got some of the materials, which have been preserved for us in this book, for his account of the early days of the Church in Jerusalem.

So Philip, after all, was not working in so obscure a corner as he thought. The whole world knows about him. He had been working behind a curtain all the while, and he never knew that 'the beloved physician,' who was listening so eagerly to all he had to tell about the early days, was going to twitch down the curtain and let the whole world see the work that he thought he was doing, all unknown and soon to be forgotten.

And that is what will happen to us all. The curtain will be twitched down, and when it is, it will be good for us if we have the same record to show that this

man had—namely, toil for the Master, indifferent to whether men see or do not see; patient labour for Him, coming out of a heart purged of all envy and jealousy of those who have been called to larger and more conspicuous service.

May we not take these many days of quiet converse in Philip's house, when the pioneer and the perfecter of the work talked together, as being a kind of prophetic symbol of the time when all who had a share in the one great and then completed work will have a share in its joy? No matter whether they have dug the foundations or laid the early courses or set the top stone and the shining battlements that crown the structure, they have all their share in the building and their portion in the gladness of the completed edifice, ‘that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.’

AN OLD DISCIPLE

‘... One Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.’—**ACTS xxi. 16.**

THERE is something that stimulates the imagination in these mere shadows of men that we meet in the New Testament story. What a strange fate that is to be made immortal by a line in this book—immortal and yet so unknown! We do not hear another word about this host of Paul's, but his name will be familiar to men's ears till the world's end. This figure is drawn in the slightest possible outline, with a couple of hasty strokes of the pencil. But if we take even these few bare words and look at them, feeling that there is a man like ourselves sketched in them, I think we can

get a real picture out of them, and that even this dim form crowded into the background of the Apostolic story may have a word or two to say to us.

His name and his birthplace show that he belonged to the same class as Paul, that is, he was a Hellenist, or a Jew by descent, but born on Gentile soil, and speaking Greek. He came from Cyprus, the native island of Barnabas, who may have been a friend of his. He was an ‘old disciple,’ which does not mean simply that he was advanced in life, but that he was ‘a disciple from the beginning,’ one of the original group of believers. If we interpret the word strictly, we must suppose him to have been one of the rapidly diminishing nucleus, who thirty years or more ago had seen Christ in the flesh, and been drawn to Him by His own words. Evidently the mention of the early date of his conversion suggests that the number of his contemporaries was becoming few, and that there were a certain honour and distinction conceded by the second generation of the Church to the survivors of the primitive band. Then, of course, as one of the earliest believers, he must, by this time, have been advanced in life. A Cypriote by birth, he had emigrated to, and resided in a village on the road to Jerusalem; and must have had means and heart to exercise a liberal hospitality there. Though a Hellenist like Paul he does not seem to have known the Apostle before, for the most probable rendering of the context is that the disciples from Cæsarea, who were travelling with the Apostle from that place to Jerusalem, ‘brought us to Mnason,’ implying that this was their first introduction to each other. But though probably unacquainted with the great teacher of the Gentiles—whose ways were looked on with much doubt by many of the Palestinian Chris-

tians—the old man, relic of the original disciples as he was, had full sympathy with Paul, and opened his house and his heart to receive him. His adhesion to the Apostle would no doubt carry weight with ‘the many thousands of Jews which believed, and were all zealous of the law,’ and was as honourable to him as it was helpful to Paul.

Now if we put all this together, does not the shadowy figure begin to become more substantial? and does it not preach to us some lessons that we may well take to heart?

I. The first thing which this old disciple says to us out of the misty distance is: Hold fast to your early faith, and to the Christ whom you have known.

Many a year had passed since the days when perhaps the beauty of the Master’s own character and the sweetness of His own words had drawn this man to Him. How much had come and gone since then—Calvary and the Resurrection, Olivet and the Pentecost! His own life and mind had changed from buoyant youth to sober old age. His whole feelings and outlook on the world were different. His old friends had mostly gone. James indeed was still there, and Peter and John remained until this present, but most had fallen on sleep. A new generation was rising round about him, and new thoughts and ways were at work. But one thing remained for him what it had been in the old days, and that was Christ. ‘One generation cometh and another goeth, but the “Christ” abideth for ever.’

‘We all are changed by still degrees;
All but the basis of the soul,’

and the ‘basis of the soul,’ in the truest sense, is that one God-laid foundation on which whosoever buildeth

shall never be confounded, nor ever need to change with changing time. Are we building there? and do we find that life, as it advances, but tightens our hold on Jesus Christ, who is our hope?

There is no fairer nor happier experience than that of the old man who has around him the old loves, the old confidences, and some measure of the old joys. But who can secure that blessed unity in his life if he depend on the love and help of even the dearest, or on the light of any creature for his sunshine? There is but one way of making all our days one, because one love, one hope, one joy, one aim binds them all together, and that is by taking the abiding Christ for ours, and abiding in Him all our days. Holding fast by the early convictions does not mean stiffening in them. There is plenty of room for advancement in Christ. No doubt Mnason, when he was first a disciple, knew but very little of the meaning and worth of his Master and His work, compared with what he had learned in all these years. And our true progress consists, not in growing away from Jesus but in growing up into Him, not in passing through and leaving behind our first convictions of Him as Saviour, but in having these verified by the experience of years, deepened and cleared, unfolded and ordered into a larger, though still incomplete, whole. We may make our whole lives helpful to that advancement and blessed shall we be if the early faith is the faith that brightens till the end, and brightens the end. How beautiful it is to see a man, below whose feet time is crumbling away, holding firmly by the Lord whom he has loved and served all his days, and finding that the pillar of cloud, which guided him while he lived, begins to glow in its heart of fire as the shadows

fall, and is a pillar of light to guide him when he comes to die! Dear friends, whether you be near the starting or near the prize of your Christian course, , cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.' See to it that the 'knowledge of the Father,' which is the 'little children's' possession, passes through the strength of youth, and the 'victory over the world' into the calm knowledge of Him 'that is from the beginning,' wherein the fathers find their earliest convictions deepened and perfected. 'Grow in grace and in the knowledge' of Him, whom to know ever so imperfectly is eternal life, whom to know a little better is the true progress for men, whom to know more and more fully is the growth and gladness and glory of the heavens. Look at this shadowy figure that looks out on us here, and listen to his far-off voice 'exhorting us all that with purpose of heart we should cleave unto the Lord.'

II. But there is another and, as some might think, opposite lesson to be gathered from this outline sketch, namely, The welcome which we should be ready to give to new thoughts and ways.

It is evidently meant that we should note Mnason's position in the Church as significant in regard to his hospitable reception of the Apostle. We can fancy how the little knot of 'original disciples' would be apt to value themselves on their position, especially as time went on, and their ranks were thinned. They would be tempted to suppose that they must needs understand the Master's meaning a great deal better than those who had never known Christ after the flesh; and no doubt they would be inclined to share in the suspicion with which the thorough-going Jewish party in the Church regarded this Paul, who had never seen the Lord. It

would have been very natural for this good old man to have said, ‘I do not like these new-fangled ways. There was nothing of this sort in my younger days. Is it not likely that we, who were at the beginning of the Gospel, should understand the Gospel and the Church’s work without this new man coming to set us right? I am too old to go in with these changes.’ All the more honourable is it that he should have been ready with an open house to shelter the great champion of the Gentile Churches; and, as we may reasonably believe, with an open heart to welcome his teaching. Depend on it, it was not every ‘old disciple’ that would have done as much.

Now does not this flexibility of mind and openness of nature to welcome new ways of work, when united with the persistent constancy in his old creed, make an admirable combination? It is one rare enough at any age, but especially in elderly men. We are always disposed to rend apart what ought never to be separated, the inflexible adherence to a fixed centre of belief, and the freest ranging around the whole changing circumference. The man of strong convictions is apt to grip every trifles of practice and every unimportant bit of his creed with the same tenacity with which he holds its vital heart, and to take obstinacy for firmness, and dogged self-will for faithfulness to truth. The man who welcomes new light, and reaches forward to greet new ways, is apt to delight in having much fluid that ought to be fixed, and to value himself on a ‘liberality’ which simply means that he has no central truth and no rooted convictions. And as men grow older they stiffen more and more, and have to leave the new work for new hands, and the new thoughts for new brains. That is all in the order of

nature, but so much the finer is it when we do see old Christian men who join to their firm grip of the old Gospel the power of welcoming, and at least bidding God-speed to, new thoughts and new workers and new ways of work.

The union of these two characteristics should be consciously aimed at by us all. Hold unchanging, with a grasp that nothing can relax, by Christ our life and our all; but with that tenacity of mind, try to cultivate flexibility too. Love the old, but be ready to welcome the new. Do not invest your own or other people's habits of thought or forms of work with the same sanctity which belongs to the central truths of our salvation; do not let the willingness to entertain new light lead you to tolerate any changes there. It is hard to blend the two virtues together, but they are meant to be complements, not opposites, to each other. The fluttering leaves and bending branches need a firm stem and deep roots. The firm stem looks noblest in its unmoved strength when it is contrasted with a cloud of light foliage dancing in the wind. Try to imitate the persistency and the open mind of that 'old disciple' who was so ready to welcome and entertain the Apostle of the Gentile Churches.

III. But there is still another lesson which, I think, this portrait may suggest, and that is, the beauty that may dwell in an obscure life.

There is nothing to be said about this old man but that he was a disciple. He had done no great thing for his Lord. No teacher or preacher was he. No eloquence or genius was in him. No great heroic deed or piece of saintly endurance is to be recorded of him, but only this, that he had loved and followed Christ all his days.

And is not that record enough? It is his blessed fate to live for ever in the world's memory, with only that one word attached to his name—a disciple.

The world may remember very little about us a year after we are gone. No thought, no deed may be connected with our names but in some narrow circle of loving hearts. There may be no place for us in any record written with a man's pen. But what does that matter, if our names, dear friends, are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, with this for sole epitaph, 'a disciple'? That single phrase is the noblest summary of a life. A thinker? a hero? a great man? a millionaire? No, a 'disciple.' That says all. May it be your epitaph and mine!

What Mnason could do he did. It was not his vocation to go into the 'regions beyond,' like Paul; to guide the Church, like James; to put his remembrances of his Master in a book, like Matthew; to die for Jesus, like Stephen. But he could open his house for Paul and his company, and so take his share in their work. 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' He that with understanding and sympathy welcomes and sustains the prophet, shows thereby that he stands on the same spiritual level, and has the makings of a prophet in him, though he want the intellectual force and may never open his lips to speak the burden of the Lord. Therefore he shall be one in reward as he is in spirit. The old law in Israel is the law for the warfare of Christ's soldiers. 'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that abideth by the stuff: they shall part alike.' The men in the rear who guard the camp and keep the communications open, may deserve honours, and crosses, and prize-

money as much as their comrades who led the charge that cut through the enemy's line and scattered their ranks. It does not matter, so far as the real spiritual worth of the act is concerned, what we do, but only why we do it. All deeds are the same which are done from the same motive and with the same devotion; and He who judges, not by our outward actions but by the springs from which they come, will at last bracket together as equals many who were widely separated here in the form of their service and the apparent magnitude of their work.

'She hath done what she could.' Her power determined the measure and the manner of her work. One precious thing she had, and only one, and she broke her one rich possession that she might pour the fragrant oil over His feet. Therefore her useless deed of utter love and uncalculating self-sacrifice was crowned by praise from His lips whose praise is our highest honour, and the world is still 'filled with the odour of the ointment.'

So this old disciple's hospitality is strangely immortal, and the record of it reminds us that the smallest service done for Jesus is remembered and treasured by Him. Men have spent their lives to win a line in the world's chronicles which are written on sand, and have broken their hearts because they failed; and this passing act of one obscure Christian, in sheltering a little company of travel-stained wayfarers, has made his name a possession for ever. 'Seest thou great things for thyself? seek them not'; but let us fill our little corners, doing our unnoticed work for love of our Lord, careless about man's remembrance or praise, because sure of Christ's, whose praise is the only fame, whose remembrance is the highest reward. 'God is

not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.'

PAUL IN THE TEMPLE

'And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28. Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. 31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. 33. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. 35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. 37. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38. Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 39. But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.'—ACTS xxi. 27-39.

THE stronger a man's faith, the greater will and should be his disposition to conciliate. Paul may seem to have stretched consideration for weak brethren to its utmost, when he consented to the proposal of the Jerusalem elders to join in performing the vow of a Nazarite, and to appear in the Temple for that purpose. But he was quite consistent in so doing; for it was not Jewish ceremonial to which he objected, but the insisting on it as necessary. For himself, he lived as a Jew, except in his freedom of intercourse with Gentiles. No doubt he knew that the death-warrant of Jewish ceremonial had been signed, but he could leave it to time to carry out the sentence. The one thing which he was resolved

should not be was its imposition on Gentile Christians. Their road to Jesus was not through Temple or synagogue. As for Jewish Christians, let them keep to the ritual if they chose. The conciliatory plan recommended by the elders, though perfectly consistent with Paul's views and successful with the Jewish Christians, roused non-Christian Jews as might have been expected.

This incident brings out very strikingly the part played by each of the two factors in carrying out God's purposes for Paul. They are unconscious instruments, and co-operation is the last thing dreamed of on either side ; but Jew and Roman together work out a design of which they had not a glimpse.

I. Note the charge against Paul. The 'Jews from Asia' knew him by sight, as they had seen him in Ephesus and elsewhere ; and possibly some of them had been fellow-passengers with him from Miletus. No wonder that they construed his presence in the Temple into an insult to it. If Luther or John Knox had appeared in St. Peter's, he would not have been thought to have come as a worshipper. Paul's teaching may very naturally have created the impression in hot-tempered partisans, who could not draw distinctions, that he was the enemy of Temple and sacrifice.

It has always been the vice of religious controversy to treat inferences from heretical teaching, which appear plain to the critics, as if they were articles of the heretic's belief. These Jewish zealots practised a very common method when they fathered on Paul all which they supposed to be involved in his position. Their charges against him are partly flat lies, partly conclusions drawn from misapprehension of his position.

partly exaggeration, and partly hasty assumptions. He had never said a word which could be construed as 'against the people.' He had indeed preached that the law was not for Gentiles, and was not the perfect revelation which brought salvation, and he had pointed to Jesus as in Himself realising all that the Temple shadowed ; but such teaching was not 'against' either, but rather for both, as setting both in their true relation to the whole process of revelation. He had not brought 'Greeks' into the Temple, not even the one Greek whom malice multiplied into many. When passion is roused, exaggerations and assumptions soon become definite assertions. The charges are a complete object-lesson in the baser arts of religious (!) partisans ; and they have been but too faithfully reproduced in all ages. Did Paul remember how he had been 'consenting' to the death of Stephen on the very same charges? How far he has travelled since that day!

II. Note the immediately kindled flame of popular bigotry. The always inflammable population of Jerusalem was more than usually excitable at the times of the Feasts, when it was largely increased by zealous worshippers from a distance. Noble teaching would have left the mob as stolid as it found them ; but an appeal to the narrow prejudices which they thought were religion was a spark in gunpowder, and an explosion was immediate. It is always easier to rouse men to fight for their 'religion' than to live by it. Jehu was proud of what he calls his 'zeal for the Lord,' which was really only ferocity with a mask on. The yelling crowd did not stop to have the charges proved. That they were made was enough. In Scotland people used to talk of 'Jeddart justice,' which consisted in hanging a man first, and trying him

leisurely afterwards. It was usually substantially just when applied to moss-troopers, but does not do so well when administered to Apostles.

Notice the carefulness to save the Temple from pollution, which is shown by the furious crowds dragging Paul outside before they kill him. They were not afraid to commit murder, but they were horror-struck at the thought of a breach of ceremonial etiquette. Of course! for when religion is conceived of as mainly a matter of outward observances, sin is reduced to a breach of these. We are all tempted to shift the centre of gravity in our religion, and to make too much of ritual etiquette. Kill Paul if you will, but get him outside the sacred precincts first. The priests shut the doors to make sure that there should be no profanation, and stopped inside the Temple, well pleased that murder should go on at its threshold. They had better have rescued the victim. Time was when the altar was a sanctuary for the criminal who could grasp its horns, but now its ministers wink at bloodshed with secret approval. Paul could easily have been killed in the crowd, and no responsibility for his death have clung to any single hand. No doubt that was the cowardly calculation which they made, and they were well on the way to carry it out when the other factor comes into operation.

III. Note the source of deliverance. The Roman garrison was posted in the fortress of Antonia, which commanded the Temple from a higher level at the north-west angle of the enclosure. Tidings 'came up' to the officer in command, Claudius Lysias by name (Acts xxiii. 26), that all Jerusalem was in confusion. With disciplined promptitude he turned out a detachment and 'ran down upon them.' The contrast

between the quiet power of the legionaries and the noisy feebleness of the mob is striking. The best qualities of Roman sway are seen in this tribune's unhesitating action, before which the excited mob cowers in fright. They 'left beating of Paul,' as knowing that a heavier hand would fall on them for rioting. With swift decision Lysias acts first and talks afterwards, securing the man who was plainly the centre of disturbance, and then having got him fast with two chains on him, inquiring who he was, and what he had been doing.

Then the crowd breaks loose again in noisy and contradictory explanations, all at the top of their voices, and each drowning the other. Clearly the bulk of them could not answer either of Lysias' questions, though they could all bellow 'Away with him!' till their throats were sore. It is a perfect picture of a mob, which is always ferocious and volubly explanatory in proportion to its ignorance. One man kept his head in the hubbub, and that was Lysias, who determined to hold his prisoner till he did know something about him. So he ordered him to be taken up into the castle; and as the crowd saw their prey escaping they made one last fierce rush, and almost swept away the soldiers, who had to pick Paul up and carry him. Once on the stairs leading to the castle they were clear of the crowd, which could only send a roar of baffled rage after them, and to this the stolid legionaries were as deaf as were their own helmets.

The part here played by the Roman authority is that which it performs throughout the Acts. It shields infant Christianity from Jewish assailants, like the wolf which, according to legend, suckled Romulus. The good and the bad features of Roman rule were

both valuable for that purpose. Its contempt for ideas, and above all for speculative differences in a religion which it regarded as a hurtful superstition, its unsympathetic incapacity for understanding its subject nations, its military discipline, its justice, which though often tainted was yet better than the partisan violence which it coerced, all helped to make it the defender of the first Christians. Strange that Rome should shelter and Jerusalem persecute!

Mark, too, how blindly men fulfil God's purposes. The two bitter antagonists, Jew and Roman, seem to themselves to be working in direct opposition; but God is using them both to carry out His design. Paul has to be got to Rome, and these two forces are combined by a wisdom beyond their ken, to carry him thither. Two cogged wheels turning in opposite directions fit into each other, and grind out a resultant motion, different from either of theirs. These soldiers and that mob were like pawns on a chessboard, ignorant of the intentions of the hand which moves them.

IV. Note the calm courage of Paul. He too had kept his head, and though bruised and hustled, and having but a minute or two beforehand looked death in the face, he is ready to seize the opportunity to speak a word for his Master. Observe the quiet courtesy of his address, and his calm remembrance of the tribune's right to prevent his speaking. There is nothing more striking in Paul's character than his self-command and composure in all circumstances. This ship could rise to any wave, and ride in any storm. It was not by virtue of happy temperament but of a fixed faith that his heart and mind were kept in perfect peace. It is not easy to disturb a man who counts not his life

dear if only he may complete his course. So these two men front each other, and it is hard to tell which has the quieter pulse and the steadier hand. The same sources of tranquil self-control and calm superiority to fortune which stood Paul in such good stead are open to us. If God is our rock and our high tower we shall not be moved.

The tribune had for some unknown reason settled in his mind that the Apostle was a well-known ‘Egyptian,’ who had headed a band of ‘Sicarii’ or ‘dagger-men,’ of whose bloody doings Josephus tells us. How the Jews should have been trying to murder such a man Lysias does not seem to have considered. But when he heard the courteous, respectful Greek speech of the Apostle he saw at once that he had got no uncultured ruffian to deal with, and in answer to Paul’s request and explanation gave him leave to speak. That has been thought an improbability. But strong men recognise each other, and the brave Roman was struck with something in the tone and bearing of the brave Jew which made him instinctively sure that no harm would come of the permission. There ought to be that in the demeanour of a Christian which is as a testimonial of character for him, and sways observers to favourable constructions.

PAUL ON HIS OWN CONVERSION

‘And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 8. And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. 10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11. And when I could not see for

the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. 12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. 15. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'—ACTS xxii. 6-16.

WE follow Paul's example when we put Jesus' appearance to him from heaven in a line with His appearances to the disciples on earth. 'Last of all, He appeared to me also.' But it does not follow that the appearances are all of the same kind, or that Paul thought that they were. They were all equally real, equally 'objective,' equally valid proofs of Jesus' risen life. On two critical occasions Paul told the story of Jesus' appearance as his best 'Apologia.' 'I saw and heard Him, and that revolutionised my life, and made me what I am.' The two accounts are varied, as the hearers were, but the differences are easily reconciled, and the broad facts are the same in both versions, and in Luke's rendering in chapter ix.

A favourite theory in some quarters is that Paul's conversion was not sudden, but that misgivings had been working in him ever since Stephen's death. Surely that view is clean against facts. Persecuting its adherents to the death is a strange result of dawning belief in 'this way.' Paul may be supposed to have known his state of mind as well as a critic nineteen centuries off does, and he had no doubt that he set out from Jerusalem a bitter hater of the convicted impostor Jesus, and stumbled into Damascus a convinced disciple because he had seen and heard Him. That is his account of the matter, which would not have been meddled with if the meddlers had not taken offence at 'the supernatural element.' We note the

emphasis which Paul puts on the suddenness of the appearance, implying that the light burst all in a moment. A little bit of personal reminiscence comes up in his specifying the time as ‘about noon,’ the brightest hour. He remembers how the light outblazed even the blinding brilliance of a Syrian noontide. He insists too on the fact that his senses were addressed, both eye and ear. He saw the glory of that light, and heard the voice. He does not say here that he saw Jesus, but that he did so is clear from Ananias’ words, ‘to see the Righteous One’ (ver. 14), and from 1 Corinthians xv. 8. Further, he makes it very emphatic that the vision was certified as no morbid fancy of his own, but yet was marked as meant for him only, by the double fact that his companions did share in it, but only in part. They did see the light, but not ‘the Righteous One’; they did hear the sound of the voice, but not so as to know what it said. The difference between merely hearing a noise and discerning the sense of the words is probably marked by the construction in the Greek, and is certainly to be understood.

The blaze struck all the company to the ground (Acts xxvi. 14). Prone on the earth, and probably with closed eyes, their leader heard his own name twice sounded, with appeal, authority, and love in the tones. The startling question which followed not only pierced conscience, and called for a reasonable vindication of his action, but flashed a new light on it as being persecution which struck at this unknown heavenly speaker. So the first thought in Saul’s mind is not about himself or his doings but about the identity of that Speaker. Awe, if not actual worship, is expressed in addressing Him as Lord. Wonder, with perhaps

some foreboding of what the answer would be, is audible in the question, ‘Who art Thou?’ Who can imagine the shock of the answer to Saul’s mind? Then the man whom he had thought of as a vile apostate, justly crucified and not risen as his dupes dreamed, lived in heaven, knew him, Saul, and all that he had been doing, was ‘apparelled in celestial light,’ and yet in heavenly glory was so closely identified with these poor people whom he had been hunting to death that to strike them was to hurt Him! A bombshell had burst, shattering the foundation of his fortifications. A deluge had swept away the ground on which he had stood. His whole life was revolutionised. Its most solid elements were dissolved into vapour, and what he had thought misty nonsense was now the solid thing. To find a ‘why’ for his persecuting was impossible, unless he had said (what in effect he did say), ‘I did it ignorantly.’ When a man has a glimpse of Jesus exalted to heaven, and is summoned by Him to give a reason for his life of alienation, that life looks very different from what it did, when seen by dimmer light. Clothes are passable by candle-light that look very shabby in sunshine. When Jesus comes to us, His first work is to set us to judge our past, and no man can muster up respectable answers to His question, ‘Why?’ for all sin is unreasonable, and nothing but obedience to Him can vindicate itself in His sight.

Saul threw down his arms at once. His characteristic impetuosity and eagerness to carry out his convictions impelled him to a surrender as complete as his opposition. The test of true belief in the ascended Jesus is to submit the will to Him, to be chiefly desirous of knowing His will, and ready to do it. ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ should be followed by ‘What shall I do, Lord?’

Blind Saul, led by the hand into the city which he had expected to enter so differently, saw better than ever before. ‘The glory of that light’ blinds us to things seen, but makes us able to see afar off the only realities, the things unseen. Speaking to Jews, as here, Paul described Ananias as a devout adherent of the law, in order to conciliate them and to suggest his great principle that a Christian was not an apostate but a complete Jew. To Agrippa he drops all reference to Ananias as irrelevant, and throws together the words on the road and the commission received through Ananias as equally Christ’s voice. Here he lays stress on his agency in restoring sight, and on his message as including two points—that it was ‘the God of our fathers’ who had ‘appointed’ the vision, and that the purpose of the vision was to make Saul a witness to all men. The bearing of this on the conciliatory aim of the discourse is plain. We note also the precedence given in the statement of the particulars of the vision to ‘knowing his will’—that was the end for which the light and the voice were given. Observe too how the twofold evidence of sense is signalised, both in the reference to seeing the Righteous One and to hearing His voice and in the commission to witness what Saul had seen and heard. The personal knowledge of Jesus, however attained, constitutes the qualification and the obligation to be His witness. And the convincing testimony is when we can say, as we all can say if we are Christ’s, ‘That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that . . . declare we unto you.’

ROME PROTECTS PAUL

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the Temple, I was in a trance ; 18. And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem : for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. 19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee : 20. And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21. And He said unto me, Depart : for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. 22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live. 23. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, 24. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging ; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. 25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned ? 26. When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest : for this man is a Roman. 27. Then the chief captain came, and said, Tell me, art thou a Roman ? He said, Yea. 28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. 29. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him : and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. 30. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.—ACTS xxii. 17-30.

THE threatened storm soon burst on Paul in Jerusalem. On the third day after his arrival he began the ceremonial recommended by the elders to prove his adherence to the law. Before the seven days during which it lasted were over the riot broke out, and he was saved from death only by the military tribune hurrying down to the Temple and dragging him from the mob.

The tribune's only care was to stamp out a riot, and whether the victim was 'that Egyptian' or not, to prevent his being murdered. He knew nothing, and cared as little, about the grounds of the tumult, but he was not going to let a crowd of turbulent Jews take the law into their own hands, and flout the majesty of Roman justice. So he lets the nearly murdered man say his say and keeps the mob off him. It was a strange scene—below, the howling zealots ; above, on the stairs,

the Christian apologist, guarded from his countrymen by a detachment of legionaries; and the assembly presided over by a Roman tribune.

It is very characteristic of Paul that he thought that his own conversion was the best argument that he could use with his fellow-Israelites. So he tells his story, and this section strikes into his speech at the point where he is coming to very thin ice indeed, and is about to vindicate his work among the Gentiles by declaring that it was done in obedience to a command from heaven. We need not discuss the date of the trance, whether it was in his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion or, as Ramsay strongly argues, is to be put at the visit mentioned in Acts xi. 30 and xii. 25.

We note the delicate, conciliatory skill with which he brings out that his conversion had not made him less a devout worshipper in the Temple, by specifying it as the scene of the trance, and prayer as his occupation then. The mention of the Temple also invested the vision with sanctity.

Very noticeable too is the avoidance of the name of Jesus, which would have stirred passion in the crowd. We may also observe that the first words of our Lord, as given by Paul, did not tell him whither he was to go, but simply bade him leave Jerusalem. The full announcement of the mission to the Gentiles was delayed both by Jesus to Paul and by Paul to his brethren. He was to 'get quickly out of Jerusalem'; that was tragic enough. He was to give up working for his own people, whom he loved so well. And the reason was their rooted incredulity and their hatred of him. Other preachers might do something with them, but Paul could not. 'They will not receive testimony of thee.'

But the Apostle's heart clung to his nation, and not

even his Lord's command was accepted without remonstrance. His patriotism led him to the verge of disobedience, and encouraged him to put in his 'But, Lord,' with boldness that was all but presumption. He ventures to suggest a reason why the Jews *would*, as he thinks, receive his testimony. They knew what he had been, and they must bethink themselves that there must be something real and mighty in the power which had turned his whole way of thinking and living right round, and made him love all that he had hated, and count all that he had prized 'but dung.' The remonstrance is like Moses', like Jeremiah's, like that of many a Christian set to work that goes against the grain, and called to relinquish what he would fain do, and do what he would rather leave undone.

But Jesus does not take His servants' remonstrances amiss, if only they will make them frankly to Him, and not keep muttering them under their breath to themselves. Let us say all that is in our hearts. He will listen, and clear away hesitations, and show us our path, and make us willing to walk in it. Jesus did not discuss the matter with Paul, but reiterated the command, and made it more pointed and clear; and then Paul stopped objecting and yielded his will, as we should do. 'When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.' The Apostle had kept from the obnoxious word as long as he could, but it had to come, and he tells the enraged listeners at last, without circumlocution, that he is the Apostle of the Gentiles, that Jesus has made him so against his will, and that therefore he must do the work appointed him, though his heart-strings crack with seeming to be cold to Israel.

The burst of fury, expressed in gestures which any-

body who has ever seen two Easterns quarrelling can understand, looks fitter for a madhouse than an audience of men in their senses. They yelled and tore their garments (and their beards, no doubt), and clutched handfuls of dust and tossed it in the air, like Shimei cursing David. What a picture of frenzied hate! And what was it all for? Because Gentiles were to be allowed to share in Israel's privileges. And what were the privileges which they thus jealously monopolised? The favour and protection of the God who, as their own prophets had taught them, was the God of the whole earth, and revealed Him to Israel that Israel might reveal Him to the world.

The less they entered into the true possession of their heritage, the more savagely they resented sharing it with the nations. The more their prerogative became a mere outward thing, the more they snarled at any one who proposed to participate in it. To seek to keep religious blessings to one's self is a conclusive proof that they are not really possessed. If we have them we shall long to impart them. Formal religionists always dislike missionary enterprise.

The tribune no doubt had been standing silently watching, in his strong, contemptuous Roman way, the paroxysm of rage sweeping over his troublesome charge. Of course he did not understand a word that the culprit had been saying, and could not make out what had produced the outburst. He felt that there was something here that he had not fathomed, and that he must get to the bottom of. It was useless to lay hold of any of these shrieking maniacs and try to get a reasonable word out of them. So he determined to see what he could make of the orator, who had already astonished him by traces of superior education,

and was evidently no mere vulgar firebrand or sedition-monger. He might have tried gentler means of extracting the truth than scourging, but that process of 'examination,' as it is flatteringly called, was common, and has not been antiquated for so many centuries that we need wonder at this Roman officer using it.

Paul submitted, and was already tied up to some whipping-post, in an attitude which would expose his back to the lash, when he quietly dropped, to the inferior officer detailed to superintend the flogging, the question which fell like a bombshell. Possibly the Apostle had not known what the soldiers were ordered to do with him till he was tied up. We cannot tell why he did not plead his citizenship sooner. But we may remember that at Philippi he did not plead it at all till after the scourging. Why he delayed so long in the present instance, and why he at last spoke the magic words, 'I am a Roman citizen,' we cannot say. But we may gather the two lessons that Christ's servants are often wise in submitting silently to wrongs, and that they are within their rights in availing themselves of legal defences against illegal treatment. Whether silence or protest is the more expedient must be determined in each case by conscience, guided by the sought-for guidance of the enlightening Spirit. The determining consideration should be, Which course will best glorify my Master?

The information brought the tribune in haste to the place where the Apostle was still tied up. The tables were turned indeed. His brief answer, 'Yea,' was accepted at once, for to claim the sacred name of Roman falsely would have been too dangerous, and no doubt Paul's bearing impressed the tribune with a conviction of his truthfulness. A hint of contempt and

doubt lies in his remark that he had paid dearly for the franchise, which remark implies, ‘Where did a poor man like you get the money then?’ A shameful trade in selling citizens’ rights was carried on in the degraded days of the Empire by underlings at court, and no doubt the tribune had procured his citizenship in that way. Paul’s answer explains that he was born free, and so was above his questioner.

That discovery put an end to all thought of scourging. Paul was at once liberated, and the tribune, terrified that he might be reported, seeks to repair his error and changes his tactics, retaining Paul for safety in the castle, and summoning the Sanhedrim, to try to find out more of this strange affair through them. The great council of the nation had sunk low indeed when it had to obey the call of a Roman soldier.

Thus once more, as so continually in the Acts, Rome is friendly to the Christian teachers and saves them from Jewish fury. To point out that early protection and benevolent sufferance is one purpose of the whole book. The days of Roman persecution had not yet come. The Empire was favourable to Christianity, not only because its officials were too proud to take interest in petty squabbles between two sects of Jews about their absurd superstitions, but reasons of political wisdom combined with supercilious indifference to bring about this attitude.

The strong hand of Rome, too, if it crushed national independence, also suppressed violence, kept men from flying at each other’s throats, spread peace over wide lands, and made the journeyings of Paul and the planting of the early Christian Churches possible. It was a God-appointed, though an imperfect, and in some aspects, mischievous unity, and prepared the way for

that higher form of unity realised in the Church which finally shattered the coarser Empire which had at first sheltered it. The Caesars were doing God's work when they were following their own lust of empire. They were yoked to Christ's chariot, though unwitting and unwilling. To them, as truly as to Cyrus, might the divine voice have said, 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.'

CHRIST'S WITNESSES

'And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'—ACTS xxiii. 11.

IT had long been Paul's ambition to 'preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.' His settled policy, as shown by this Book of the Acts, was to fly at the head, to attack the great centres of population. We trace him from Antioch to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus; and of course Rome was the goal, where a blow struck at the heart might reverberate through the empire. So he had planned for it, and prayed about it, and thought about it, and spoken about it. But his wish was accomplished, as our prayers and purposes so often are, in a manner very strange to him. A popular riot in Jerusalem, a half-friendly arrest by the contemptuous impartiality of a Roman officer, a final rejection by the Sanhedrim, a prison in Cæsarea, an appeal to Cæsar, a weary voyage, a shipwreck: this was the chain of circumstances which fulfilled his desire, and brought him to the imperial city.

My text comes at the crisis of his fate. He has just been rejected by his people, and for the moment is in

safety in the castle under the charge of the Roman garrison. One can fancy how, as he lay there in the barrack that night, he felt that he had come to a turning-point; and the thoughts were busy in his mind, ‘Is this for life or for death? Am I to do any more work for Christ, or am I silenced for ever?’ —‘And the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul!’ The divine message assured him that he should live; it testified of Christ’s approbation of his past, and promised him that, in recompense for that past, he should have wider work to do. So he passed to the unknown future quietly; and went on his way with the Master by his side.

Now, dear friends, it seems to me that in these great words there lie lessons applying to all Christian people as truly, though in different fashion, as they did to the Apostle, and having an especial bearing on that great enterprise of Christian missions, with which I would connect them in this sermon. I desire, then, to draw out the lessons which seem to me to lie under the surface of this great promise.

I. To live ought to be, for a Christian, to witness.

The promise in form is a promise of continued testimony-bearing; in its substance, one might say, it is a promise of continued life. Paul is cheered, not by being told that the wrath of the enemy will launch itself at his head in vain, and that he will bear a charmed life through it all, but by being told that there is work for him to do yet. That is the shape in which the promise of life is held out to him. So it always ought to be; a Christian man’s life ought to be one continuous witnessing for that Lord Christ who stood by the Apostle in the castle at Jerusalem.

Let me just urge this upon you for a few moments. It seems to me that to raise up witnesses for Himself is, in one aspect, the very purpose of all Christ's work. You and I, dear brethren, if we have any living hold of that Lord, have received Him into our hearts, not only in order that for ourselves we may rejoice in Him, but in order that, for ourselves rejoicing in Him, we may 'show forth the virtues of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.' There is no creature so great as that he is not regarded as a means to a further end; and there is no creature so small but that he has the right to claim happiness and blessing from the Hand that made him. Jesus Christ has drawn us to Himself, that we may know the sweetness of His presence, the cleansing of His blood, the stirring and impulse of His indwelling life in us for our own joy and our own completion, but also that we may be His witnesses and weapons, according to that great word: 'This people have I formed for Myself. They shall shew forth My praise.'

God has 'shined into our hearts in order that we may give,' reflecting the beams that fall upon them, 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.' Brother and sister, if you have the Christian life in your souls, one purpose of your possessing it is that you may bear witness for Him.

Again, such witness-bearing is the result of all true, deep, Christian life. All life longs to manifest itself in action. Every conviction that a man has seeks for utterance; especially so do the beliefs that go deepest and touch the moral and spiritual nature and relationships of a man. He that perceives them is thereby impelled to desire to utter them. There can be no

real, deep possession of that great truth of the Gospel which we profess to be the foundation of our personal lives, unless we have felt the impulse to spread the name and to declare the sweetness of the Lord. The very same impulse that makes the loving heart carve the beloved name on the smooth rind of the tree makes it sweet to one who is in real touch and living fellowship with Jesus Christ to speak about Him. O brother! *there is a very sharp test for us.* I know that there are hundreds of professing Christians—decent, respectable sort of people, with a tepid, average amount of Christian faith and principle in them—who never felt that overmastering desire, ‘*I must let this thing out through my lips.*’ Why? Why do they not feel it? Because their own possession of Christ is so superficial and partial. Jeremiah’s experience will be repeated where there is vigorous Christian life: ‘*Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire*’—that burned itself through all the mass that was laid upon it, and ate its way victoriously into the light—‘*and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.*’ Christian men and women, do you know anything of that o'er-mastering impulse? If you do not, look to the depth and reality of your Christian profession.

Again, this witnessing is the condition of all strong life. If you keep nipping the buds off a plant you will kill it. If you never say a word to a human soul about your Christianity, your Christianity will tend to evaporate. Action confirms and strengthens convictions; speech deepens conviction; and although it is possible for any one—and some of us ministers are in great danger of making the possibility a reality—to talk away his religion, for one of us who loses it by speaking too much about it, there are twenty that

damage it by speaking too little. Shut it up, and it will be like some wild creature put into a cellar, fast locked and unventilated; when you open the door it will be dead. Shut it up, as so many of our average Christian professors and members of our congregations and churches do, and when you come to take it out, it will be like some volatile perfume that has been put into a vial and locked away in a drawer and forgotten; there will be nothing left but an empty bottle, and a rotten cork. Speak your faith if you would have your faith strengthened. Muzzle it, and you go a long way to kill it. You are witnesses, and you cannot blink the obligation nor shirk the duties without damaging that in yourselves to which you are to witness.

Further, this task of witnessing for Christ can be done by all kinds of life. I do not need to dwell upon the distinction between the two great methods which open themselves out before every one of us. They do so; for direct work in speaking the name of Jesus Christ is possible for every Christian, whoever he or she is, however weak, ignorant, uninfluential, with howsoever narrow a circle. There is always somebody that God means to be the audience of His servant whenever that servant speaks of Christ. Do you not know that there are people in this world, as wives, children, parents, friends of different sorts, who would listen to you more readily than they would listen to any one else speaking about Jesus Christ? Friend, have you utilised these relationships in the interests of that great Name, and in the highest interests of the persons that sustain them to you, and of yourselves who sustain these to them?

And then there is indirect work that we can all do in

various ways. I do not mean only by giving money, though of course that is important, but I mean all the manifold ways in which Christian people can show their sympathy with, and their interest in, the various forms in which adventurous, chivalrous, enterprising Christian benevolence expresses itself. It was an old law in Israel that 'as his part was that went down into the battle, so should his part be that tarried by the stuff.' When victory was won and the spoil came to be shared, the men who had stopped behind and looked after the base of operations and kept open the communications received the same portion as the man that, in the front rank of the battle, had rushed upon the spears of the Amalekites. Why? Because from the same motive they had been co-operant to the same great end. The Master has taken up that very thought, and has applied it in relation to the indirect work of His people, when He says, 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' The motive is the same; therefore the essential character of the act is the same; therefore the recompense is identical. You can witness for Christ directly, if you can say—and you can all say if you like—'We have found the Messias,' and you can witness for Christ by casting yourselves earnestly into sympathy with and, so far as possible, help to the work that your brethren are doing. Dear friends, I beseech you to remember that we are all of us, if we are His followers, bound in our humble measure and degree, and with a reverent apprehension of the gulf between us and Him, still to take up His words and say, 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth.'

II. There is a second thought that I would suggest from these words, and that is that secular events are ordered with a view to this witnessing.

Take the case before us. Here are two independent and hostile powers; on the one hand the bigoted Jewish Sanhedrim, hating the Roman yoke; and on the other hand the haughty and cruel pressure of that yoke on a recalcitrant and reluctant people: and these two internecine enemies are working on their own lines, each very willing to thwart the other, Mechanicians talk of the 'composition of forces,' by which two pressures acting at right angles to each other on a given object, impart to it a diagonal motion. The Sanhedrim on the one side, representing Judaism, and the captain of the castle on the other, representing the Roman power, work into each other's hands, although neither of them knows it; and work out the fulfilment of a purpose that is hidden from them both.

No doubt it would be a miserably inadequate account of things to say that the Roman Empire came into existence for the sake of propagating Christianity. No doubt it is always dangerous to account for any phenomenon by the ends which, to our apprehension, it serves. But at the same time the study of the purposes which a given thing, being in existence, serves, and the study of the forces which brought it into existence, ought to be combined, and when combined, they present a double reason for adoring that great Providence which 'makes the wrath of men to praise' it, and uses for moral and spiritual ends the creatures that exist, the events that emerge, and even the godless doings of godless men.

So here we have a standing example of the way in

which, like silk-worms that are spinning threads for a web that they have no notion of, the deeds of men that think not so are yet grasped and twined together by Jesus Christ, the Lord of providence, so as to bring about the realisation of His great purposes. And that is always so, more or less clearly.

For instance, if we wish to understand our own lives, do not let us dwell upon the superfinalities of joy or sorrow, gain or loss, but let us get down to the depth, and see that all these externals have two great purposes in view—first, that we may be made like our Lord, as the Scripture itself says, ‘That we may be partakers of His holiness,’ and then that we may bear our testimony to His grace and love. Oh, if we would only look at life from that point of view, we should be brought to a stand less often at what we choose to call the mysteries of providence! Not enjoyment, not sorrow, but our perfecting in godliness and of the increase of our power and opportunities to bear witness to Him, are the intention of all that befalls us.

I need not speak about how this same principle must be applied, by every man who believes in a divine providence, to the wider events of the world’s history. I need not dwell upon that, nor will your time allow me to do it, but one word I should like to say, and that is that surely the two facts that we, as Christians, possess, as we believe, the pure faith, and that we, as Englishmen, are members of a community whose influence is world-wide, do not come together for nothing, or only that some of you might make fortunes out of the East Indian and China trade, but in order that all we English Christians might feel that, our speaking as we do the language which is destined, as it would appear, to run round the whole world, and our

having, as we have, the faith which we believe brings salvation to every man of every race and tongue who accepts it, and our having this responsible necessary contact with the heathen races, lay upon us English Christians obligations the pressure and solemnity of which we have yet failed to appreciate.

Paul was immortal till his work was done. ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; thou must bear witness at Rome.’ And so, for ourselves and for the Gospel that we profess, the same divine Providence which orders events so that His servants may have the opportunities of witnessing to it, will take care that it shall not perish—notwithstanding all the premature jubilation of anti-Christian literature and thought in this day—until it has done its work. We need have no fear for ourselves, for though our blind eyes often fail to see, and our bleeding hearts often fail to accept, the conviction that there are no unfinished lives for His servants, yet we may be sure that He will watch over each of His children till they have finished the work that He gives them to do. And we may be sure, in regard to His great Gospel, that nothing can sink the ship that carries Christ and His fortunes. ‘Be of good cheer . . . thou hast borne witness . . . thou must bear witness.’

III. Lastly, we have here another principle—namely that faithful witnessing is rewarded by further witnessing.

‘Thou hast . . . in Jerusalem,’ the little city perched upon its crag; ‘Thou must . . . in Rome,’ the great capital seated on its seven hills. The reward for work is more work. Jesus Christ did not say to the Apostle, though he was ‘wearied with that which came upon him daily, the care of all the

churches,' 'Thou hast borne witness, and now come apart and rest'; but He said to him, 'Thou hast filled the smaller sphere; for recompense I put thee into a larger.'

That is the law for life and everywhere, the tools to the hand that can use them. The man that can do a thing gets it to do in too large a measure, as he sometimes thinks; but he gets it, and it is all right that he should. 'To him that hath shall be given.' And it is the law for heaven. 'Thou hast borne witness down on the little dark earth; come up higher and witness for Me here, amid the blaze.'

It is the law for this Christian work of ours. If you have shone faithfully in your 'little corner,' as the child's hymn says, you will be taken out and set upon the lamp-stand, that you 'may give light to all that are in the house.' And it is the law for this great enterprise of Christian missions, as we all know. We are overwhelmed with our success. Doors are opening around us on every side. There is no limit to the work that English Churches can do, except their inclination to do it. But the opportunities open to us require a far deeper consecration and a far closer dwelling beside our Master than we have ever realised. We are half asleep yet; we do not know our resources in men, in money, in activity, in prayer.

Surely there can be no sadder sign of decadence and no surer precursor of extinction than to fall beneath the demands of our day; to have doors opening at which we are too lazy or selfish to go in; to be so sound asleep that we never hear the man of Macedonia when he stands by us and cries, 'Come over and help us!' We are members of a Church that God has appointed to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are citizens of a nation whose influence is ubiquitous and

felt in every land. By both characters, God summons us to tasks which will tax all our resources worthily to do. We inherit a work from our fathers which God has shown that He owns by giving us these golden opportunities. He summons us : 'Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes. Come out of Jerusalem; come into Rome.' Shall we respond? God give us grace to fill the sphere in which He has set us, till He lifts us to the wider one, where the faithfulness of the steward is exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord!

A PLOT DETECTED

'And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. 16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. 17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.'—ACTS xxiii. 12-22.

'THE wicked plotteth against the just. . . . The Lord will laugh at him.' The Psalmist's experience and his faith were both repeated in Paul's case. His speech before the Council had set Pharisees and Sadducees squabbling, and the former had swallowed his Christianity for the sake of his being 'a Pharisee and the

son of a Pharisee.' Probably, therefore, the hatchers of this plot were Sadducees, who hated Pharisees even more than they did Christians. The Apostle himself was afterwards not quite sure that his skilful throwing of the apple of discord between the two parties was right (Acts xxiv. 21), and apparently it was the direct occasion of the conspiracy. A Christian man's defence of himself and his faith gains nothing by clever tactics. It is very doubtful whether what Paul spoke 'in that hour' was taught him by the Spirit.

'The corruption of the best is the worst.' There is a close and strange alliance between formal religion and murderous hatred and vulpine craft, as the history of ecclesiastical persecution shows; and though we have done with fire and faggot now, the same evil passions and tempers do still in modified form lie very near to a Christianity which has lost its inward union with Jesus and lives on surface adherence to forms. In that sense too 'the letter killeth.' We lift up our hands in horror at these fierce fanatics, 'ready to kill' Paul, because he believed in resurrection, angel, and spirit. We need to guard ourselves lest something of their temper should be in us. There is a devilish ingenuity about the details of the plot, and a truly Oriental mixture of murderous passion and calculating craft. The serpent's wisdom and his poison fangs are both apparent. The forty conspirators must have been 'ready,' not only to kill Paul, but to die in the attempt, for the distance from the castle to the council-chamber was short, and the detachment of legionaries escorting the prisoner would have to be reckoned with.

The pretext of desiring to inquire more fully into Paul's opinions derived speciousness from his ambigui-

ous declaration, which had set the Council by the ears and had stopped his examination. Luke does not tell us what the Council said to the conspirators, but we learn from what Paul's nephew says in verse 20 that it 'agreed to ask thee to bring down Paul.' So once more the tail drove on the head, and the Council became the tool of fierce zealots. No doubt most of its members would have shrunk from themselves killing Paul, but they did not shrink from having a hand in his death. They were most religious and respectable men, and probably soothed their consciences with thinking that, after all, the responsibility was on the shoulders of the forty conspirators. How men can cheat themselves for a while as to the criminality of indirectly contributing to criminal acts, and how rudely the thin veil will be twitched aside one day!

II. The abrupt introduction of Paul's nephew into the story piques curiosity, but we cannot say more about him than is told us here. We do not know whether he was moved by being a fellow-believer in Jesus, or simply by kindred and natural affection. Possibly he was, as his uncle had been, a student under some distinguished Rabbi. At all events, he must have had access to official circles to have come on the track of the plot, which would, of course, be covered up as much as possible. The rendering in the margin of the Revised Version gives a possible explanation of his knowledge of it by suggesting that he had 'come in upon them'; that is, upon the Council in their deliberations. But probably the rendering preferred in the text is preferable, and we are left to conjecture his source of information, as almost everything else about him. But it is more profitable to note how God works out His purposes and delivers His servants by 'natural'

means, which yet are as truly divine working as was the sending of the angel to smite off Peter's chains, or the earthquake at Philippi.

This lad was probably not an inhabitant of Jerusalem, and that he should have been there then, and come into possession of the carefully guarded secret, was more than a fortunate coincidence. It was divinely ordered, and God's finger is as evident in the concatenation of co-operating natural events as in any 'miracle.' To co-ordinate these so that they concur to bring about the fulfilment of His will may be a less conspicuous, but is not a less veritable, token of a sovereign Will at work in the world than any miracle is. And in this case how wonderfully separate factors, who think themselves quite independent, are all handled like pawns on a chessboard by Him who 'makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and girds Himself with the remainder thereof!' Little did the fiery zealots who were eager to plunge their daggers into Paul's heart, or the lad who hastened to tell him the secret he had discovered, or the Roman officer who equally hastened to get rid of his troublesome prisoner, dream that they were all partners in bringing about one God-determined result—the fulfilment of the promise that had calmed Paul in the preceding night: 'So must thou bear witness also at Rome.'

III. Paul had been quieted after his exciting day by the vision which brought that promise, and this new peril did not break his peace. With characteristic clear-sightedness he saw the right thing to do in the circumstances, and with characteristic promptitude he did it at once. Luke wastes no words in telling of the Apostle's emotions when this formidable danger was sprung on him, and the very reticence deepens the

impression of Paul's equanimity and practical wisdom. A man who had had such a vision last night might well possess his soul in patience, even though such a plot was laid bare this morning; and each servant of Jesus may be as well assured, as was Paul the prisoner, that the Lord shall 'keep him from all evil,' and that if his life is 'witness' it will not end till his witness is complete. Our faith should work in us calmness of spirit, clearness of perception of the right thing to do, swift seizing of opportunities. Paul trusted Jesus' word that he should be safe, whatever dangers threatened, but that trust stimulated his own efforts to provide for his safety.

IV. The behaviour of the captain is noteworthy, as showing that he had been impressed by Paul's personal magnetism, and that he had in him a strain of courtesy and kindness. He takes the lad by the hand to encourage him, and he leads him aside that he may speak freely, and thereby shows that he trusted him. No doubt the youth would be somewhat flustered at being brought into the formidable presence and by the weight of his tidings, and the great man's gentleness would be a cordial. A superior's condescension is a wonderful lip-opener. We all have some people who look up to us, and to whom small kindnesses from us are precious. We do not 'render to all their dues,' unless we give gracious courtesy to those beneath, as well as 'honour' to those above, us. But the captain could clothe himself too with official reserve and keep up the dignity of his office. He preserved an impenetrable silence as to his intentions, and simply sealed the young man's lips from tattling about the plot or the interview with him. Promptly he acted, without waiting for the Council's application to him. At once

he prepared to despatch Paul to Cæsarea, glad enough, no doubt, to wash his hands of so troublesome a charge. Thus he too was a cog in the wheel, an instrument to fulfil the promise made in vision, God's servant though he knew it not.

A LOYAL TRIBUTE¹

'... Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3. We accept it always . . . with all thankfulness.'—ACTS xxiv. 2-3.

THESE words were addressed by a professional flatterer to one of the worst of the many bad Roman governors of Syria. The speaker knew that he was lying, the listeners knew that the eulogium was undeserved; and among all the crowd of bystanders there was perhaps not a man who did not hate the governor, and would not have been glad to see him lying dead with a dagger in his breast.

But both the fawning Tertullus and the oppressor Felix knew in their heart of hearts that the words described what a governor ought to be. And though they are touched with the servility which is not loyalty, and embrace a conception of the royal function attributing far more to the personal influence of a monarch than our State permits, still we may venture to take them as the starting-point for two or three considerations suggested to us, by the celebrations of the past week.

I almost feel that I owe an apology for turning to that subject, for everything that can be said about it has been said far better than I can say it. But still, partly because my silence might be misunderstood,

¹ Preached on the occasion of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

and partly because an opportunity is thereby afforded for looking from a Christian point of view at one or two subjects that do not ordinarily come within the scope of one's ministry, I venture to choose such a text now.

I. The first thing that I would take it as suggesting is the grateful acknowledgment of personal worth.

I suppose the world never saw a national rejoicing like that through which we have passed. For the reigns that have been long enough to admit of it have been few, and those in which intelligently and sincerely a whole nation of freemen could participate have been fewer still. But now all England has been one; whatever our divisions of opinion, there have been no divisions here. Not only have the bonfires flared from hill to hill in this little island of ours, but all over the world, into every out of the way corner where our widely-spread race has penetrated, the same sentiment has extended. All have yielded to the common impulse, the rejoicing of a free people in a good Queen.

That common sentiment has embraced two things, the office and the person. There was a pathetic contrast between these two when that sad-hearted widow walked alone up the nave of Westminster Abbey, and took her seat on the stone of destiny on which for a millennium kings have been crowned. The contrast heightened both the reverence due to the office and the sympathy due to the woman. The Sovereign is the visible expression of national power, the incarnation of England, living history, the outcome of all the past, the representative of harmonised and blended freedom and law, a powerful social influence from which much good might flow, a moderating and

uniting power amidst fierce partisan bitterness and hate, a check against rash change. There is no nobler office upon earth.

And when, as is the case in this long reign, that office has been filled with some consciousness of its responsibilities, the recognition of the fact is no flattery but simple duty. We cannot attribute to the personal initiative of the Queen the great and beneficent changes which have coincided with her reign. Thank God, no monarch can make or mar England now. But this we can say,

‘Her court was pure, her life serene.’

A life touched with many gracious womanly charities, delighting in simple country pleasures, not strange to the homes of the poor, quick to sympathise with sorrow, especially the humblest, as many a weeping widow at a pit mouth has thankfully felt; sternly repressive of some forms of vice in high places, and, as we may believe, not ignorant of the great Comforter nor disobedient to the King of kings,—for such a royal life a nation may well be thankful. We outsiders do not know how far personal influence from the throne has in any case restrained or furthered national action, but if it be true, as is alleged, that twice in her reign the Queen has kept England from the sin and folly of war, once from a fratricidal conflict with the great new England across the Atlantic, then we owe her much. If in later years that life has somewhat shrunk into itself and sat silent, with Grief for a companion, those who know a like desolation will understand, and even the happy may honour an undying love and respect the seclusion of an undying sorrow. So I say: ‘Forasmuch as under thee we

enjoy great quietness, we accept it with all thankfulness.'

II. My text may suggest for us a wider view of progress which, although not initiated by the Queen, has coincided with her fifty years' reign.

In the Revised Version, instead of 'worthy deeds are done,' we read '*evils are corrected*'; and that is the true rendering. The double function which is here attributed falsely to an oppressive tyrant is the ancient ideal of monarchy—first, that it shall repress disorders and secure tranquillity within the borders and across the frontiers; and second, that abuses and evils shall be corrected by the foresight of the monarch.

Now, in regard to both these functions we have learned that a nation can do them a great deal better than a sovereign. And so when we speak of progress during this fifty years' reign, we largely mean the progress which England in its toiling millions and in its thinking few has won for itself. Let me in very brief words try to touch upon the salient points of that progress for which as members of the nation it becomes us as Christian people to be thankful. Enough hosannas have been sung already, and I need not add my poor voice to them, about material progress and commercial prosperity and the growth of manufacturing industry and inventions and all the rest of it. I do not for a moment mean to depreciate these, but it is of more importance that a telegraph should have something to say than that it should be able to speak across the waters, and 'man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' We who live in a great commercial community and know how solid comfort and hope and gladness are all contingent, in millions of humble homes,

upon the manufacturing industry of these districts, shall never be likely to underrate the enormous expansion in national industry, and the consequent enormous increase in national wealth, which belongs to this last half century. I need say nothing about these.

Let me remind you, and I can only do it in a sentence or two, of more important changes in these fifty years. English manners and morals have been bettered, much of savagery and coarseness has been got rid of; low, cruel amusements have been abandoned. Thanks to the great Total Abstinence movement very largely, the national conscience has been stirred in regard to the great national sin of intoxication. A national system of education has come into operation and is working wonders in this land. Newspapers and books are cheapened; political freedom has been extended and ‘broadened slowly down,’ as is safe, ‘from precedent to precedent,’ so that no party thinks now of reversing any of the changes, howsoever fiercely they were contested ere they were won. Religious thought has widened, the sects have come nearer each other, men have passed from out of a hard doctrinal Christianity, in which the person of Christ was buried beneath the cobwebs of theology, into a far freer and a far more Christ-regarding and Christ-centred faith. And if we are to adopt such a point of view as the brave Apostle Paul took, the antagonism against religion, which is a marked feature of our generation, and contrasts singularly with the sleepy acquiescence of fifty years ago, is to be put down to the credit side of the account. ‘For,’ he said, like a bold man believing that he had an irrefragable truth in his hands, ‘I will tarry here, for a great door and an effectual is opened,

and there are many adversaries.' Wherever a whole nation is interested and stirred about religious subjects, even though it may be in contradiction and antagonism, God's truth can fight opposition far better than it can contend with indifference. Then if we look upon our churches, whilst there is amongst them all abounding worldliness much to be deplored, there is also, thank God, springing up amongst us a new consciousness of responsibility, which is not confined to Christian people, for the condition of the poor and the degraded around us; and everywhere we see good men and women trying to stretch their hands across these awful gulfs in our social system which make such a danger in our modern life, and to reclaim the outcasts of our cities, the most hopeless of all the heathen on the face of the earth. These things, on which I have touched with the lightest hand, all taken together do make a picture for which we may be heartily thankful.

Only, brethren, let us remember that that sort of talk about England's progress may very speedily become offensive self-conceit, and a measuring of ourselves with ludicrous self-satisfaction against all other nations. There is a bastard patriotism which has been very loud-mouthed in these last days, of which wise men should beware.

Further, such a contemplation of the elements of national progress, which we owe to no monarch and to no legislature, but largely to the indomitable pluck and energy of our people, to Anglo-Saxon persistence not knowing when it is beaten, and to the patient meditation of thoughtful minds and the self-denying efforts of good philanthropical and religious people—such a contemplation, I say, may come between us and

the recognition of the highest source from which it flows, and be corrupted into forgetfulness of God. ‘Beware lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God . . . and thou say in thine heart, My power, and the might of mine hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth.’

And the last caution that I would put in here is, let us beware lest the hosannas over national progress shall be turned into ‘Rest and be thankful,’ or shall ever come in the way of the strenuous and persistent reaching forth to the fair ideal that lies so far before us.

III. That leads me to the last point on which I would say a word, viz., that my text with its reference to the correction of evils, as one of the twin functions of the monarch, naturally suggests to us the thought which should follow all recognition of progress in the past—the consideration of what yet remains to be done.

A great controversy has been going on, or at least a remarkable difference of opinion has been expressed in recent months by two of the greatest minds and clearest heads in England; one of our greatest poets and one of our greatest statesmen. The one looking back over sixty years sees but foiled aspirations and present devildom and misery. The other looking back over the same period sees accomplished dreams and the prophecy of further progress. It is not for me to enter upon the strife between such authorities. Both are right. Much has been achieved. ‘There remaineth

yet very much land to be possessed.' Whatever have been the victories and the blessings of the past, there are rotten places in our social state which, if not cauterised and healed, will break out into widespread and virulent sores. There are dangers in the near future which may well task the skill of the bravest and the faith of the most trustful. There are clouds on the horizon which may speedily turn jubilations into lamentations, and the best security against these is that each of us in his place, as a unit however insignificant in the great body politic, should use our little influence on the side that makes for righteousness, and see to it that we leave some small corner of this England, which God has given us in charge, sweeter and holier because of our lives. The ideal for you Christian men and women is the organisation of society on Christian principles. Have we got to that yet, or within sight of it, do you suppose? Look round you. Does anybody believe that the present arrangements in connection with unrestricted competition and the distribution of wealth coincide accurately with the principles of the New Testament? Will anybody tell me that the state of a hundred streets within a mile of this spot is what it would be if the Christian men of this nation lived the lives that they ought to live? Could there be such rottenness and corruption if the 'salt' had not 'lost his savour'? Will anybody tell me that the disgusting vice which our newspapers do not think themselves degraded by printing in loathsome detail, and so bringing the foulness of a common sewer on to every breakfast-table in the kingdom, is in accordance with the organisation of society on Christian principles? Intemperance, social impurity, wide, dreary tracts of ignorance, degradation, bestiality,

the awful condition of the lowest layer in our great cities, crushed like some crumbling bricks beneath the ponderous weight of the splendid superstructure, the bitter partisan spirit of politics, where the followers of each chief think themselves bound to believe that he is immaculate and that the other side has no honour or truth belonging to it—these things testify against English society, and make one almost despair when one thinks that, after a thousand years and more of professing Christianity, that is all that we can show for it.

O brethren! we may be thankful for what has been accomplished, but surely there had need also to be penitent recognition of failure and defect. And I lay it on the consciences of all that listen to me now to see to it that they do their parts as members of this body politic of England. A great heritage has come down from our fathers; pass it on bettered by your self-denial and your efforts. And remember that the way to mend a kingdom is to begin by mending yourselves, and letting Christ's kingdom come in your own hearts. Next we are bound to try to further its coming in the hearts of others, and so to promote its leavening society and national life. No Christian is clear from the blood of men and the guilt of souls who does not, according to opportunity and capacity, repair before his own door, and seek to make some one know the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Christ.

There is no finality for a Christian patriot until his country be organised on Christian principles, and so from being merely a 'kingdom of the world' become 'a Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.' To help forward that consummation, by however little, is the

noblest service that prince or peasant can render to his country. By conformity to the will of God and not by material progress or intellectual enlightenment is a state prosperous and strong. To keep His statutes and judgments is ‘your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

PAUL BEFORE FELIX

‘Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: 11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. 14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. 19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. 20. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil-doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21. Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. 22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. 23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. 24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.’—ACTS xxiv. 10-25.

TERTULLUS made three charges against Paul: first, that he incited to rebellion; second, that he was a principal member of a ‘sect’; third (with a ‘moreover,’ as if an afterthought), that he had profaned the Temple. It was more clever than honest to put the real cause of Jewish hatred last, since it was a trifle in Roman eyes,

and to put first the only thing that Felix would think worth notice. A duller man than he might have scented something suspicious in Jewish officials being so anxious to suppress insurrection against Rome, and probably he had his own thoughts about the good faith of the accusers, though he said nothing. Paul takes up the three points in order. Unsupported charges can only be met by emphatic denials.

I. Paul's speech is the first part of the passage. Its dignified, courteous beginning contrasts well with the accuser's dishonest flattery. Paul will not lie, but he will respect authority, and will conciliate when he can do so with truth. Felix had been 'judge' for several years, probably about six. What sort of a judge he had been Paul will not say. At any rate he had gained experience which might help him in picking his way through Tertullus's rhetoric.

The Apostle answers the first charge with a flat denial, with the remark that as the whole affair was less than a fortnight old the truth could easily be ascertained, and that the time was very short for the Jews to have 'found' him such a dangerous conspirator, and with the obviously unanswerable demand for proof to back up the charge. In the absence of witnesses there was nothing more to be done about number one of the accusations, and a just judge would have said so and sent Tertullus and his clients about their business.

The second charge Paul both denies and admits. He does belong to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. But that is not a 'sect'; it is 'the Way.' It is not a divergence from the path in which the fathers have walked, trodden only by some self-willed schismatics, but it is the one God-appointed path of life, 'the old way,' the only road by which a man can walk nobly and travel to the

skies. Paul's whole doctrine as to the relation of Judaism to Christianity is here in germ and in a form adapted to Felix's comprehension. This so-called sect (ver. 14 takes up Tertullus's word in ver. 5) is the true Judaism, and its members are more truly 'Jews' than they who are such 'outwardly.' For what has Paul cast away in becoming a Christian? Not the worship of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, not the law, not the prophets, not the hope of a resurrection.

He does not say that he practises all the things written in the law, but that he 'believes' them. Then the law was revelation as well as precept, and was to be embraced by faith before it could be obeyed in practice; it was, as he says elsewhere, a 'schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.' Judaism is the bud; Christianity is the bright consummate flower. Paul was not preaching his whole Gospel, but defending himself from a specific charge; namely that, as being a 'Nazarene,' he had started off from the main line of Jewish religion. He admits that he is a 'Nazarene,' and he assumes correctly that Felix knew something about them, but he denies that he is a sectary, and he assumes that the charge would be more truly made against those who, accusing him, disbelieved in Christ. He hints that they did not believe in either law or prophets, else they would have been Nazarenes too.

The practical results of his faith are stated. 'Herein'; that is in the faith and hope just spoken of. He will not say that these make him blameless towards God and men, but that such blamelessness is his aim, which he pursues with earnest toil and self-control. A Christianity which does not sovereignly sway life and brace its professor up to the self-denial needful to

secure a conscience void of offence is not Paul's kind of Christianity. If we move in the circle of the great Christian truths we shall gird ourselves to subdue the flesh, and will covet more than aught else the peace of a good conscience. But, like Paul, we shall be slow to say that we have attained, yet not afraid to say that we strive towards, that ideal.

The third charge is met by a plain statement of his real purpose in coming to Jerusalem and frequenting the Temple. ‘Profane the Temple! Why, I came all the way from Greece on purpose to worship at the Feast; and I did not come empty-handed either, for I brought alms for my nation’—the contributions of the Gentiles to Jews—‘and I was a worshipper, discharging the ceremonial purifications.’ They called him a ‘Nazarene’; he was in the Temple as a ‘Nazarite.’ Was it likely that, being there on such an errand, he should have profaned it?

He begins a sentence, which would probably have been an indignant one, about the ‘certain Jews from Asia,’ the originators of the whole trouble, but he checks himself with a fine sense of justice. He will say nothing about absent men. And that brings him back to his strong point, already urged, the absence of proof of the charges. Tertullus and company had only hearsay. What had become of the people who said they saw him in the Temple? No doubt they had thought discretion the better part of valour, and were not anxious to face the Roman procedure.

The close of the speech carries the war into the enemy's quarters, challenging the accusers to tell what they had themselves heard. They *could* be witnesses as to the scene at the Council, which Tertullus had wisely said nothing about. Pungent sarcasm is in

Paul's closing words, especially if we remember that the high officials, like Ananias the high-priest, were Sadducees. The Pharisees in the Council had acquitted him when they heard his profession of faith in a resurrection. That was his real crime, not treason against Rome or profanation of the Temple. The present accusers might be eager for his condemnation, but half of their own Sanhedrim had acquitted him. 'And these unworthy Jews, who have cast off the nation's hope and believe in no resurrection, are accusing me of being an apostate! Who is the sectary—I or they?'

II. There was only one righteous course for Felix, namely, to discharge the prisoner. But he yielded to the same temptation as had mastered Pilate, and shrank from provoking influential classes by doing the right thing. He was the less excusable, because his long tenure of office had taught him something, at all events, of 'the Way.' He had too many crimes to venture on raising enemies in his government; he had too much lingering sense of justice to give up an innocent man. So like all weak men in difficult positions he temporised, and trusted to accident to make the right thing easier for him.

His plea for delay was conveniently indefinite. When was Lysias coming? His letter said nothing about such an intention, and took for granted that all the materials for a decision would be before Felix. Lysias could tell no more. The excuse was transparent, but it served to stave off a decision, and to-morrow would bring some other excuse. Prompt carrying out of all plain duty is the only safety. The indulgence given to Paul, in his light confinement, only showed how clearly Felix knew himself to be doing wrong, but small alleviations do not patch up a great injustice.

III. One reading inserts in verse 24 the statement that Drusilla wished to see Paul, and that Felix summoned him in order to gratify her. Very probably she, as a Jewess, knew something of ‘the Way,’ and with a love of anything odd and new, which such women cannot do without, she wanted to see this curious man and hear him talk. It might amuse her, and pass an hour, and be something to gossip about.

She and Felix got more than they bargained for. Paul was not now the prisoner, but the preacher; and his topics were not wanting in directness and plainness. He ‘reasoned of righteousness’ to one of the worst of unrighteous governors; of ‘temperance’ to the guilty couple who, in calling themselves husband and wife, were showing themselves given over to sinful passions; and of ‘judgment to come’ to a man who, to quote the Roman historian, ‘thought that he could commit all evil with impunity.’

Paul’s strong hand shook even that obdurate soul, and roused one of the two sleeping consciences. Drusilla may have been too frivolous to be impressed, but Felix had so much good left that he could be conscious of evil. Alas! he had so much evil that he suppressed the good. His ‘convenient season’ was then; it never came again. For though he communed with Paul often, he trembled only once. So he passed into the darkness.

FELIX BEFORE PAUL

A Sermon to the Young

'And as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'—ACTS xxiv. 25.

FELIX and his brother had been favourite slaves of the Emperor, and so had won great power at court. At the date of this incident he had been for some five or six years the procurator of the Roman province of Judæa; and how he used his power the historian Tacitus tells us in one of his bitter sentences, in which he says, 'He wielded his kingly authority with the spirit of a slave, in all cruelty and lust.'

He had tempted from her husband, Drusilla, the daughter of that Herod whose dreadful death is familiar to us all; and his court reeked with blood and debauchery. He is here face to face with Paul for the second time. On a former interview he had seen good reason to conclude that the Roman Empire was not in much danger from this one Jew whom his countrymen, with suspicious loyalty, were charging with sedition; and so he had allowed him a very large margin of liberty.

On this second occasion he had sent for him evidently not as a judge, but partly with a view to try to get a bribe out of him, and partly because he had some kind of languid interest, as most Romans then had, in Oriental thought—some languid interest perhaps too in this strange man. Or he and Drusilla were possibly longing for a new sensation, and not indisposed to give a moment's glance at Paul with his singular ideas.

So they called for the Apostle, and the guilty

couple found a judge in their prisoner. Paul does not speak to them as a Greek philosopher, anxious to please high personages, might have done, but he goes straight at their sins: he reasons ‘of righteousness’ with the unjust judge, ‘of temperance’ with the self-indulgent, sinful pair, ‘of the judgment to come’ with these two who thought that they could do anything they liked with impunity. Christianity has sometimes to be exceedingly rude in reference to the sins of the upper classes.

As Paul went on, a strange fear began to creep about the heart of Felix. It is the watershed of his life that he has come to, the crisis of his fate. Everything depends on the next five minutes. Will he yield? Will he resist? The tongue of the balance trembles and hesitates for a moment, and then, but slowly, the wrong scale goes down; ‘Go thy way for this time.’ Ah! if he had said, ‘Come and help me to get rid of this strange fear,’ how different all might have been! The metal was at the very point of melting. What shape would it take? It ran into the wrong mould, and, as far as we know, it was hardened there. ‘It might have been once, and he missed it, lost it for ever. No sign marked out that moment from the common uneventful moments, though it saw the death of a soul.’

Now, my dear young friends, I do not intend to say anything more to you of this man and his character, but I wish to take this incident and its lessons and urge them on your hearts and consciences.

I. Let me say a word or two about the fact, of which this incident is an example, and of which I am afraid the lives of many of you would furnish other examples, that men lull awakened consciences to sleep and excuse

delay in deciding for Christ by half-honest promises to attend to religion at some future time.

'Go thy way for this time' is what Felix is really anxious about. His one thought is to get rid of Paul and his disturbing message for the present. But he does not wish to shut the door altogether. He gives a sop to his conscience to stop its barking, and he probably deceives himself as to the gravity of his present decision by the lightly given promise and its well-guarded indefiniteness, 'When I have a convenient season I will send for thee.' The thing he really means is—Not now, at all events; the thing he hoodwinks himself with is—By and by. Now that is what I know that some of you are doing; and my purpose and earnest prayer are to bring you now to the decision which, by one vigorous act of your wills, will settle the question for the future as to which God you are going to follow.

So then I have just one or two things to say about this first part of my subject. Let me remind you that however beautiful, however gracious, however tender and full of love and mercy and good tidings the message of God's love in Jesus Christ is, there is another side to it, a side which is meant to rouse men's consciences and to awaken men's fears.

If you bring a man like the man in the story, Felix, or a very much better man than he—any of you who hear me now—into contact with these three thoughts, 'Righteousness, temperance, judgment to come,' the effect of such a direct appeal to moral convictions will always be more or less to awaken a sense of failure, insufficiency, defect, sin, and to create a certain creeping dread that if I set myself against the great law of God, that law of God will have a way of crushing me. The fear is well founded, and not only does the contem-

plation of God's *law* excite it. God's gospel comes to us, and just because it is a gospel, and is intended to lead you and me to love and trust Jesus Christ, and give our whole hearts and souls to Him—just because it is the best 'good news' that ever came into the world, it begins often (not always, perhaps) by making a man feel what a sinful man he is, and how he has gone against God's law, and how there hang over him, by the very necessities of the case and the constitution of the universe, consequences bitter and painful. Now I believe that there are very few people who, like you, come occasionally into contact with the preaching of the truth, who have not had their moments when they felt—"Yes, it is all true—it is all true. *I am* bad, and *I have* broken God's law, and there *is* a dark lookout before me!" I believe that most of us know what that feeling is.

And now my next step is—that the awakened conscience is just like the sense of pain in the physical world, it has a work to do and a mission to perform. It is meant to warn you off dangerous ground. Thank God for pain! It keeps off death many a time. And in like manner thank God for a swift conscience that speaks! It is meant to ring an alarm-bell to us, to make us, as the Bible has it, 'flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us.' My imploring question to my young friends now is: 'Have you used that sense of evil and wrongdoing, when it has been aroused in your consciences, to lead you to Jesus Christ, or what have you done with it?'

There are two persons in this Book of the Acts of the Apostles who pass through the same stages of feeling up to a certain point, and then they diverge. And the two men's outline history is the best sermon that I can preach upon this point. Felix becoming afraid, recoils,

shuts himself up, puts away the message that disturbs him, and settles himself back into his evil. The Philip-pian jailer becoming afraid (the phrases in the original being almost identical), like a sensible man tries to find out the reason of his fear and how to get rid of it; and falls down at the Apostles' feet and says, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

The fear is not meant to last ; it is of no use in itself. It is only an impelling motive that leads us to look to the Saviour, and the man that uses it so has used it rightly. Yet there rises in many a heart that transparent self-deception of delay. 'They all with one consent began to make excuse'; that is as true to-day as it was true then. My experience tells me that it will be true in regard to a sad number of you who will go away feeling that my poor word has gone a little way into their hardened hide, but settling themselves back into their carelessness, and forgetting all impressions that have been made. O dear young friend, do not do that, I beseech you ! Do not stifle the wholesome alarm and cheat yourself with the notion of a little delay !

II. And now I wish next to pass very swiftly in review before you some of the reasons why we fall into this habit of self-deceiving, indecision, and delay—'Go thy way' would be too sharp and unmistakable if it were left alone, so it is fined off. 'I will not commit myself beyond to-day,' 'for this time go thy way, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.'

What are the reasons for such an attitude as that? Let me enumerate one or two of them as they strike me. First, there is the instinctive, natural wish to get rid of a disagreeable subject—much as a man, without knowing what he is doing, twitches his hand away from

the surgeon's lancet. So a great many of us do not like—and no wonder that we do not like—these thoughts of the old Book about 'righteousness and temperance and judgment to come,' and make a natural effort to turn our minds away from the contemplation of the subject, because it is painful and unpleasant. Do you think it would be a wise thing for a man, if he began to suspect that he was insolvent, to refuse to look into his books or to take stock, and let things drift, till there was not a halfpenny in the pound for anybody? What do you suppose his creditors would call him? They would not compliment him on either his honesty or his prudence, would they? And is it not the part of a wise man, if he begins to see that something is wrong, to get to the bottom of it and, as quickly as possible, to set it right? And what do you call people who, suspecting that there may be a great hole in the bottom of the ship, never man the pumps or do any caulking, but say, 'Oh, she will very likely keep afloat until we get into harbour'?

Do you not think that it would be a wiser thing for you if, *because* the subject is disagreeable, you would force yourself to think about it until it became agreeable to you? You can change it if you will, and make it not at all a shadow or a cloud or a darkness over you. And you can scarcely expect to claim the designation of wise and prudent orderers of your lives until you do. Certainly it is not wise to shuffle a thing out of sight because it is not pleasing to think about.

Then there is another reason. A number of our young people say, 'Go thy way for this time,' because you have a notion that it is time enough for you to begin to think about serious things and be religious when you grow a bit older. And some of you even, I dare say, have an idea that religion is all very well for

people that are turned sixty and are going down the hill, but that it is quite unnecessary for you. Shakespeare puts a grim word into the mouth of one of his characters, which sets the theory of many of us in its true light, when, describing a dying man calling on God, he makes the narrator say : 'I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.'

Some of my hearers practically live on that principle, and are tempted to regard thoughts of God as in place only among medicine bottles, or when the shadows of the grave begin to fall cold and damp on our path. 'Young men will be young men,' 'We must sow our wild oats,' 'You can't put old heads on young shoulders'—and such like sayings, often practically mean that vice and godlessness belong to youth, and virtue and religion to old age, just as flowers do to spring and fruit to autumn. Let me beseech you not to be deceived by such a notion ; and to search your own thoughts and see whether it be one of the reasons which leads you to say, 'Go thy way for this time.'

Then again some of us fall into this habit of putting off the decision for Christ, not consciously, not by any distinct act of saying, 'No, I will not,' but simply by letting the impressions made on our hearts and consciences be crowded out of them by cares and enjoyments and pleasures and duties of this world. If you had not so much to study at College, you would have time to think about religion. If you had not so many parties and balls to go to, you would have time to nourish and foster these impressions. If you had not your place to make in the warehouse, if you had not this, that, and the other thing to do ; if you had not love and pleasure and ambition and advancement and

mental culture to attend to, you would have time for religion ; but as soon as the seed is sown and the sower's back is turned, hovering flocks of light-winged thoughts and vanities pounce down upon it and carry it away, seed by seed. And if some stray seed here and there remains and begins to sprout, the ill weeds which grow apace spring up with ranker stems and choke it. 'The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and efface the impression made upon your hearts.

Here as I speak some serious thought is roused ; by tomorrow at midday it has all gone. You did not intend it to go, you did not set yourself to banish it, you simply opened the door to the flocking in of the whole crowd of the world's cares and occupations, and away went the shy, solitary thought that, if it had been cared for and tended, might have led you at last to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Do not allow yourselves to be drifted, by the rushing current of earthly cares, from the impressions that are made upon your consciences and from the duty that you know you ought to do !

And then some of you fall into this attitude of delay, and say to the messenger of God's love, 'Go thy way for this time,' because you do not like to give up something that you know is inconsistent with His love and service. Felix would not part with Drusilla nor disgorge the ill-gotten gains of his province. Felix therefore was obliged to put away from him the thoughts that looked in that direction. I wonder if there is any young man listening to me now who feels that if he lets my words carry him where they seek to carry him, he will have to give up 'fleshly lusts which war against the soul'? I wonder if there is any young woman listening to me now who feels that if she lets my

words carry her where they would carry her, she will have to live a different life from that which she has been living, to have more of a high and a noble aim in it, to live for something else than pleasure? I wonder if there are any of you who are saying, 'I cannot give up that'? My dear young friend, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.' It is better for thee to enter into life blind than with both eyes to be cast into hell-fire.

Reasons for delay, then, are these: first, getting rid of an unpleasant subject; second, thinking that there is time enough; third, letting the world obliterate the impressions that have been made; and fourth, shrinking from the surrender of something that you know you will have to give up.

III. And now let me very briefly, as my last point, put before you one or two of the reasons which I would fain might be conclusive with you for present decision to take Christ for your Saviour and your Master.

And I say, Do not delay, but *now* choose Him for your Redeemer, your Friend, your Helper, your Commander, your All; because delay is really decision in the wrong way. Do not delay, but take Jesus Christ as the Saviour of your sinful souls, and rest your hearts upon Him to-night before you sleep; because there is no real reason for delay. No season will be more convenient than the present season. Every time is the right time to do the right thing, every time is the right time to begin following Him. There is nothing to wait for. There is no reason at all, except their own disinclination, why every man and woman listening to me should not now grasp the Cross of Christ as their only hope for forgiveness and acceptance, and yield themselves to that Lord, to live in His service for ever.

Let not this day pass without your giving yourselves to Jesus Christ, because every time that you have this message brought to you, and you refuse to accept it, or delay to accept it, you make yourselves less capable of receiving it another time.

If you take a bit of phosphorus and put it upon a slip of wood and ignite the phosphorus, bright as the blaze is, there drops from it a white ash that coats the wood and makes it almost incombustible. And so when the flaming conviction laid upon your hearts has burnt itself out, it has coated the heart, and it will be very difficult to kindle the light there again. Felix said, ‘Go thy way, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee.’ Yes, and he did send for Paul, and he talked with him often—he repeated the conversation, but we do not know that he repeated the trembling. He often communed with Paul, but it was only once that he was alarmed. You are less likely to be touched by the Gospel message for every time that you have heard it and put it away. That is what makes my place here so terribly responsible, and makes me feel that my words are so very feeble in comparison with what they ought to be. I know that I may be doing harm to men just because they listen and are not persuaded, and so go away less and less likely to be touched.

Ah, dear friends! you will perhaps never again have as deep impressions as you have now; or at least they are not to be reckoned upon as probable, for the tendency of all truth is to lose its power by repetition, and the tendency of all emotion which is not acted upon is to become fainter and fainter. And so I beseech you that now you would cherish any faint impression that is being made upon your hearts and

consciences. Let it lead you to Christ; and take Him for your Lord and Saviour now.

I say to you: Do that now because delay robs you of large blessing. You will never want Jesus Christ more than you do to-day. You need Him in your early hours. Why should it be that a portion of your lives should be left unfilled by that rich mercy? Why should you postpone possessing the purest joy, the highest blessing, the divinest strength? Why should you put off welcoming your best Friend into your heart? Why should you?

I say to you again, Take Christ for your Lord, because delay inevitably lays up for you bitter memories and involves dreadful losses. There are good Christian men and women, I have no doubt, in this world now, who would give all they have, if they could blot out of the tablets of their memories some past hours of their lives, before they gave their hearts to Jesus Christ. I would have you ignorant of such transgression. O young men and women! if you grow up into middle life not Christians, then should you ever become so, you will have habits to fight with, and remembrances that will smart and sting; and some of you, perhaps, remembrances that will pollute, even though you are conscious that you are forgiven. It is a better thing not to know the depths of evil than to know them and to have been raised from them. You will escape infinite sorrows by an early cleaving to Christ your Lord.

And last of all I say to you, give yourselves now to Jesus Christ, because no to-morrow may be yours. Delay is gambling, very irrationally, with a very uncertain thing—your life and your future opportunities. ‘You know not what shall be on the morrow.’

For a generation I have preached in Manchester

these annual sermons to the young. Ah, how many of those that heard the early ones are laid in their graves; and how many of them were laid in *early* graves; and how many of them said, as some of you are saying, ‘When I get older I will turn religious’! And they never got older. It is a commonplace word that, but I leave it on your hearts. You have no time to lose.

Do not delay, because delay is decision in the wrong way; do not delay, because there is no reason for delay; do not delay, because delay robs you of a large blessing; do not delay, because delay lays up for you, if ever you come back, bitter memories; do not delay, because delay may end in death. And for all these reasons, come as a sinful soul to Christ the Saviour; and ask Him to forgive you, and follow in His footsteps, and do it now! ‘To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’

CHRIST'S REMONSTRANCES

‘And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.’—ACTS xxvi. 14.

‘CAN the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?’ No. But God can change the skin; because He can change the nature. In this story of the conversion of the Apostle Paul—the most important thing that happened that day—we have an instance how brambles may become vines; tares may become wheat; and a hater of Jesus Christ may be changed in a moment into His lover and servant, and, if need be, His martyr.

Now the very same motives and powers which were brought to bear upon the Apostle Paul by miracle are

being brought to bear upon every one of us; and my object now is just to trace the stages of the process set forth here, and to ask some of you, if you, like Paul, have been 'obedient to the heavenly vision.' Stages, I call them, though they were all crowded into a moment, for even the lightning has to pass through the intervening space when it flashes from one side of the heavens to another, and we may divide its path into periods. Time is very elastic, as any of us whose lives have held great sorrows or great joys or great resolutions well know.

I. The first of these all but simultaneous and yet separable stages was the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Of course to the Apostle it was mediated by miracle; but real as he believed that appearance of the risen Lord in the heavens to be, and valid as he maintained that it was as the ground of his Apostleship, he himself, in one of his letters, speaks of the whole incident as being the revelation of God's Son *in him*. The revelation in heart and mind was the main thing, of which the revelation to eye and ear were but means. The means, in his case, are different from those in ours; the end is the same. To Paul it came like the rush of a cataract that the Christ whom he had thought of as lying in an unknown grave was living in the heavens and ruling there. You and I, I suppose, do not need to be convinced by miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but the bare fact that Jesus was living in the heavens would have had little effect upon Saul, unless it had been accompanied with the revelation of the startling fact that between him and Jesus Christ there were close personal relations, so that he had to do with Jesus, and Jesus with him.

'Saul, Saul! why persecutest thou Me?' They used

to think that they could wake sleep-walkers by addressing them by name. Jesus Christ, by speaking His name to the Apostle, wakes him out of his diseased slumber, and brings him to wholesome consciousness. There are stringency and solemnity of address in that double use of the name ‘Saul, Saul!’

What does such an address teach you and me? That Jesus Christ, the living, reigning Lord of the universe, has perfect knowledge of each of us, and that we each stand isolated before Him, as if all the light of omniscience were focussed upon us. He knows our characters; He knows all about us, and more than that, He directly addresses Himself to each man and woman among us.

We are far too apt to hide ourselves in the crowd, and let all the messages of God’s love, the warnings of His providences, as well as the teachings and invitations and pleadings of His gospel, fly over our heads as if they were meant vaguely for anybody. But they are all intended for *thee*, as directly as if thou, and thou only, wert in the world. I beseech you, lay this to heart, that although no audible sounds may rend the silent heavens, nor any blaze may blind thine eye, yet that as really, though not in the same outward fashion as Saul, when they were all fallen to the earth, felt himself to be singled out, and heard a voice ‘speaking to *him* in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Saul, Saul! ’ *thou* mayest hear a voice speaking to thee in the English tongue, by thy name, and directly addressing its gracious remonstrances and its loving offers to thy listening ear. I want to sharpen the blunt ‘whosoever’ into the pointed ‘thou.’ And I would fain plead with each of my friends hearing me now to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is meant for

thee, and that Christ speaks to *thee*. ‘I have a message from God unto thee,’ just as Nathan said unto David, ‘*Thou art the man!*’

Do not lose yourselves in the crowd or hide yourselves from the personal incidence of Christ’s offer, but feel that you stand, as you do indeed, alone the hearer of His voice, the possible recipient of His saving mercy.

II. Secondly, notice, as another stage in this process, the discovery of the true character of the past.

‘Why persecutest thou Me?’ Now I am not going to be tempted from my more direct purpose in this sermon to dwell even for a moment on the beautiful, affecting, strengthening thought here, of the unity of Jesus Christ with all the humble souls that love Him, so as that, whatsoever any member suffers, the Head suffers with it. I must leave that truth untouched.

Saul was brought to look at all his past life as standing in immediate connection with Jesus Christ. Of course he knew before the vision that he had no love to Him whom he thought to be a Galilean impostor, and that the madness with which he hated the servants was only the glancing off of the arrow that he would fain have aimed at the Master. But he did not know that Jesus Christ counted every blow struck at one of His servants as being struck at Him. Above all he did not know that the Christ whom he was persecuting was reigning in the heavens. And so his whole past life stood before him in a new aspect when it was brought into close connection with Christ, and looked at as in relation to Him.

The same process would yield very remarkable results if applied to our lives. If I could only get you for one quiet ten minutes, to lay all your past, as far

as memory brought it to your minds, right before that pure and loving Face, I should have done much. One infallible way of judging of the rottenness or goodness of our actions is that we should bring them where they will all be brought one day, into the brightness of Christ's countenance. If you want to find out the flaws in some thin, badly-woven piece of cloth, you hold it up against the light, do you not? and then you see all the specks and holes, and the irregular threads. Hold up your lives in like fashion against the light, and I shall be surprised if you do not find enough there to make you very much ashamed of yourselves. Were you ever on the stage of a theatre in the daytime? Did you ever see what miserable daubs the scenes look, and how seamy it all is when the pitiless sunshine comes in? Let that great light pour on your life, and be thankful if you find out what a daub it has been, whilst yet colours and brushes and time are at your disposal, and you may paint the future fairer than the past.

Again, this revelation of Saul's past life disclosed its utter unreasonableness. That one question, '*Why persecutest thou Me?*' pulverised the whole thing. It was like the wondering question so unanswerable in the Psalm, '*Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?*' If you take into account what you are, and where you stand, you can find no reason, except utterly unreasonable ones, for the lives that I fear some of us are living—lives of godlessness and Christlessness. There is nothing in all the world a tithe so stupid as sin. There is nothing so unreasonable, if there be a God at all, and if we depend upon Him, and have duties to Him, as the lives that some of you are living. You admit, most of you, that there

is such a God; you admit, most of you, that you do hang upon Him; you admit, in theory, that you ought to love and serve Him. The bulk of you call yourselves Christians. That is to say, you believe, as a piece of historical fact, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and died for men. And, believing that, you turn your back on Him, and neither love nor serve nor trust Him nor turn away from your iniquity. Is there anything outside a lunatic asylum more madlike than that? 'Why persecutest thou?' 'And he was speechless,' for no answer was possible. Why neglectest thou? Why forgettest thou? Why, admitting what thou dost, art thou not an out-and-out Christian? If we think of all our obligations and relations, and the facts of the universe, we come back to the old saying, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' and any man who, like many of my hearers, fails to give his heart and life to Jesus Christ will one day have to say, 'Behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly.' Wake up, my brother, to apply calm reason to your lives while yet there is time, and face the question, *Why* dost thou stand as thou dost to Jesus Christ? There is nothing sadder than the small share that deliberate reason and intelligent choice have in the ordering of most men's lives. You live by impulse, by habit, by example, by constraint of the outward necessities of your position. But I am sure that there are many amongst us now who have very seldom, if ever, sat down and said, 'Now let me think, until I get to the ultimate grounds of the course of life that I am pursuing.' You can carry on the questions very gaily for a step or two, but then you come to a dead pause. 'What do I do so-and-so for?' 'Because I like it.'

'Why do I like it?' 'Because it meets my needs, or my desires, or my tastes, or my intellect.' Why do you make the meeting of your needs, or your desires, or your tastes, or your intellect your sole object? Is there any answer to that? The Hindoos say that the world rests upon an elephant, and the elephant rests upon a tortoise. What does the tortoise rest on? Nothing! Then that is what the world and the elephant rest on. And so, though you may go bravely through the first stages of the examination, when you come to the last question of all, you will find out that your whole scheme of life is built upon a blunder; and the blunder is this, that anybody can be blessed without God.

Further, this disclosure of the true character of his life revealed to Saul, as in a lightning flash, the ingratitude of it.

'Why persecutest thou Me?' That was as much as to say, 'What have I done to merit thy hate? What have I *not* done to merit rather thy love?' Paul did not know all that Jesus Christ had done for him. It took him a lifetime to learn a little of it, and to tell his brethren something of what he had learned. And he has been learning it ever since that day when, outside the walls of Rome, they hacked off his head. He has been learning more and more of what Jesus Christ has done for him, and why he should not persecute Him but love Him.

But the same appeal comes to each of us. What has Jesus Christ done for thee, my friend, for me, for every soul of man? He has loved me better than His own life. He has given Himself for me. He has lingered beside me, seeking to draw me to Himself, and He still lingers. And this, at the best, tremulous

faith, this, at the warmest, tepid love, this, at the completest, imperfect devotion and service, are all that we bring to Him; and some of us do not bring even these. Some of us have never known what it was to sacrifice one inclination for the sake of Christ, nor to do one act for His dear love's sake, nor to lean our weakness upon Him, nor to turn to Him and say, 'I give Thee myself, that I may possess Thee.' 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' I have heard of wounded soldiers striking with their bayonets at the ambulance men who came to help them. That is like what some of you do to the Lord who died for your healing, and comes as the Physician, with bandages and with balm, to bind up the broken-hearted. 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'

III. Lastly, we have here a warning against self-inflicted wounds.

That second clause of the remonstrance on the lips of Christ in my text is, according to the true reading, not found in the account of Paul's conversion in the ninth chapter of this book. My text is from Paul's own story; and it is interesting to notice that he adds this eminently pathetic and forcible appeal to the shorter account given by the writer of the book. It had gone deep into his heart, and he could not forget.

The metaphor is a very plain one. The ox-goad was a formidable weapon, some seven or eight feet in length, shod with an iron point, and capable of being used as a spear, and of inflicting deadly wounds at a pinch. Held in the firm hand of the ploughman, it presented a sharp point to the rebellious animal under the yoke. If the ox had readily yielded to the gentle prick, given, not in anger, but for guidance, it had been well. But if it lashes out with its hoofs against

the point, what does it get but bleeding flanks? Paul had been striking out instead of obeying, and he had won by it only bloody hocks.

There are two truths deducible from this saying, which may have been a proverb in common use. One is the utter futility of lives that are spent in opposing the divine will. There is a strong current running, and if you try to go against it you will only be swept away by it. Think of some little fishing coble coming across the bow of a great ocean-going steamer. What will be the end of that? Think of a pony-chaise jogging up the line, and an express train thundering down it. What will be the end of that? Think of a man lifting himself up and saying to God, ‘I will not!’ when God says, ‘Do thou this!’ or ‘Be thou this!’ What will be the end of that? ‘The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’ ‘It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks’—hard in regard to breaches of common morality, as some of my friends sitting quietly in these pews very well know. It is hard to indulge in sensual sin. You cannot altogether dodge what people call the ‘natural consequences’; but it was God who made Nature; and so I call them God-inflicted penalties. It is hard to set yourselves against Christianity. I am not going to speak of that at all now, only when we think of the expectations of victory with which so many antagonists of the Cross have gaily leaped into the arena, and of how the foes have been forgotten and there stands the Cross still, we may say of the whole crowd, beginning with the earliest, and coming down to the latest brand-new theory that is going to explode Christianity—‘it is hard to kick against the pricks.’

Your own limbs you may wound; you will not do the goad much harm.

But there is another side to the proverb of my text, and that is the self-inflicted harm that comes from resisting the pricks of God's rebukes and remonstrances, whether inflicted by conscience or by any other means; including, I make bold to say, even such poor words as these of mine. For if the first little prick of conscience, a warning and a guide, be neglected, the next will go a great deal deeper. The voice which, before you do the wrong thing, says to you, 'Do not do it,' in tones of entreaty and remonstrance, speaks, after you have done it, more severely and more bitterly. The Latin word *remorse*, and the old English name for conscience, 'again-bite'—which latter is a translation of the other—teach us the same lesson, that the gnawing which comes after wrong done is far harder to bear than the touch that should have kept us from the evil. The stings of marine jelly-fish will burn for days after, if you wet them. And so all wrong-doing, and all neglect of right-doing of every sort, carries with it a subsequent pain, or else the wounded limb *mortifies*, and that is worse. There is no pain then; it would be better if there were. There is such a possibility as to have gone on so obstinately kicking against the pricks and leaving the wounds so unheeded, as that they mortify and feeling goes. A conscience 'seared with a hot iron' is ten times more dreadful than a conscience that pains and stings.

So, dear brethren, let me beseech you to listen to the pitying Christ, who says to us each, more in sorrow than in anger, 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' It is no pleasure to Him to hold

the goad, nor that we should wound ourselves upon it. He has another question to put to us, with another ‘why,’ ‘Why should ye be stricken any more? Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel?’

There is another metaphor drawn from the employment of oxen which we may set side by side with this of my text: ‘Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ The yoke accepted, the goad is laid aside; and repose and healing from its wounds are granted to us. Dear brethren, if you will listen to the Christ revealed in the heavens, as knowing all about you, and remonstrating with you for your unreasonableness and ingratitude, and setting before you the miseries of rebellion and the suicide of sin, then you will have healing for all your wounds, and your lives will neither be self-tormenting, futile, nor unreasonable. The mercy of Jesus Christ lavished upon you makes your yielding yourselves to Him your only rational course. Anything else is folly beyond comparison and harm and loss beyond count.

FAITH IN CHRIST

‘... Faith that is in Me.’—ACTS xxvi. 18.

IT is commonly said, and so far as the fact is concerned, said truly, that what are called the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity are rather found in the Epistles than in the Gospels. If we wish the clearest statements of the nature and person of Christ, we turn to Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians. If we wish the fullest dissertation upon Christ’s work as a sacrifice, we go to the Epistle to the Hebrews. If we seek to

prove that men are justified by faith, and not by works, it is to the Epistles to Romans and Galatians that we betake ourselves,—to the writings of the servant rather than the words of the Master. Now this fuller development of Christian doctrine contained in the teaching of the Apostles cannot be denied, and need not be wondered at. The reasons for it I am not going to enter upon at present; they are not far to seek. Christ came not to *speak* the Gospel, but to *be* the Gospel. But then, this truth of a fuller development is often over-strained, as if Christ ‘spake nothing concerning priesthood,’ sacrifices, faith. He *did* so speak when on earth. It is often misused by being made the foundation of an inference unfavourable to the authority of the Apostolic teaching, when we are told, as we sometimes are, that not Paul but Jesus speaks the words which we are to receive.

Here we have Christ Himself speaking from the heavens to Paul at the very beginning of the Apostle's course, and if any one asks us where did Paul get the doctrines which he preached, the answer is, Here, on the road to Damascus, when blind, bleeding, stunned, with all his self-confidence driven out of him—with all that he had been crushed into shivers—he saw his Lord, and heard Him speak. These words spoken then are the germ of all Paul's Epistles, the keynote to which all his writings are but the melody that follows, the mighty voice of which all his teaching is but the prolonged echo. ‘Delivering thee,’ says Christ to him, ‘from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith

that is in Me.' Now, I ask you, what of Paul's Gospel is not here? Man's ruin, man's depravity and state of darkness, the power of Satan, the sole redemptive work of Christ, justification by belief in that, sanctification coming with justification, and glory and rest and heaven at last—there they all are in the very first words that sounded upon the quickened ear of the blinded man when he turned from darkness to light.

It would be foolish, of course, to try to exhaust such a passage as this in a sermon. But notice, what a complete summary of Christian truth there lies in that one last clause of the verse, 'Inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.' Translate that into distinct propositions, and they are these: Faith refers to Christ; that is the first thing. Holiness depends on faith; that is the next: '*sanctified by faith.*' Heaven depends on holiness: that is the last: '*inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.*' So there we have the whole gospel!

To the one part of this comprehensive summary which is contained in my text I desire to turn now, in hope of gathering from it some truths as to that familiar word 'faith' which may be of use to us all. The expression is so often on our lips that it has come to be almost meaningless in many minds. These key-words of Scripture meet the same fate as do coins that have been long in circulation. They pass through so many fingers that the inscriptions get worn off them. We can all talk about faith and forgiveness and justifying and sanctifying, but how few of us have definite notions as to what these words that come so easily from our lips mean! There is a vast deal of cloudy haze in the minds of average church and chapel goers as to what this wonder-working faith may really be.

Perhaps we may then be able to see large and needful truths gleaming in these weighty syllables which Christ Jesus spoke from heaven to Paul, 'faith that is in Me.'

I. In the first place, then, the object of faith is Christ.

'Faith that is in Me' is that which is directed towards Christ as its object. Christianity is not merely a system of truths about God, nor a code of morality deducible from these. In its character of a revelation, it is the revelation of God in the person of His Son. Christianity in the soul is not the belief of these truths about God, still less the acceptance and practice of these pure ethics, but the affiance and the confidence of the whole spirit fixed upon the redeeming, revealing Christ.

True, the object of our faith is Christ as made known to us in the facts of His recorded life and the teaching of His Apostles. True, our only means of knowing Him as of any other person whom we have never seen, are the descriptions of Him, His character and work, which are given. True, the empty name 'Christ' has to be filled with the doctrinal and biographical statements of Scripture before the Person on whom faith is to fix can be apprehended or beheld. True, it is Christ as He is made known to us in the word of God, the Incarnate Son, the perfect Man, the atoning Sacrifice, the risen Lord, the ascended Intercessor in whom we have to trust. The characteristics and attributes of Christ are known to us only by biographical statements and by doctrinal propositions. These must be understood in some measure and accepted, ere there can be faith in Him. Apart from them, the image of Christ must stand a pale, colourless phantom before the mind, and the faith which is directed towards such a nebula will be an unintelligent emotion, as nebulous and impotent as the vagueness towards which it turns.

Thus far, then, the attempt which is sometimes made to establish a Christianity without doctrines on the plea that the object of faith is not a proposition, but a person, must be regarded as nugatory; for how can the 'person' be an object of thought at all, but through the despised 'propositions'?

But while on the one hand it is true that Christ as revealed in these doctrinal statements of Scripture, the divine human Saviour, is the Object of faith, on the other hand it is to be remembered that it is He, and not the statements about Him, who is the Object.

Look at His own words. He does not merely say to us, 'Believe this, that, and the other thing about Me; put your credence in this and the other doctrine; accept this and the other promise; hope for this and the other future thing.' All these come with but are not the central act. He says, 'Believe: believe in Me! "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life": He that cometh to *Me* shall never hunger, and he that believeth in *Me* shall never thirst.' Do we rightly appreciate that? I think that if people firmly grasped this truth—that Christ is the Gospel, and that the Object of faith is not simply the truths that are recorded here in the word, but He with regard to whom these truths are recorded—it would clear away rolling wreaths of fog and mist from their perceptions. The whole feeling and attitude of a man's mind is different, according as he is trusting a person, or according as he is believing something about a person. And this, therefore, is the first broad truth that lies here. Faith has reference not merely to a doctrine, not to a system; but deeper than all these, to a living Lord—'faith that is in *Me*'.

I cannot help observing, before I go on—though it may be somewhat of a digression—what a strong inference with regard to the divinity of Christ is deducible from this first thought that He is the Object to whom faith has reference. If you look into the Old Testament, you will find constantly, ‘Trust ye in the Lord for ever’; ‘Put thy trust in Jehovah!’ There, too, though under the form of the Law, there, too, faith was the seed and germ of all religion. There, too, though under the hard husk of apparently external obedience and ceremonial sacrifices, the just lived by faith. Its object was the Jehovah of that ancient covenant. Religion has always been the same in every dispensation. At every time, that which made a man a devout man has been identically the same thing. It has always been true that it has been faith which has bound man to God, and given man hope. But when we come to the New Testament, the centre is shifted, as it would seem. What has become of the grand old words, ‘Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah’? Look! Christ stands there, and says, ‘Believe upon Me’! With calm, simple, profound dignity, He lays His hand upon all the ancient and consecrated words, upon all the ancient and hallowed emotions that used to set towards the unseen God between the cherubim, throned above judgment and resting upon mercy; and He says, ‘They are Mine—give them to Me! That ancient trust, I claim the right to have it. That old obedience, it belongs to Me. I am He to whom in all time the loving hearts of them that loved God, have set. I am the Angel of the Covenant, in whom whoever trusteth shall never be confounded.’ And I ask you just to take that one simple fact, that Christ thus steps, in the New Testament—in so far as the direction of the religious

emotions of faith and love are concerned—that Christ steps into the place filled by the Jehovah of the Old; and ask yourselves honestly what theory of Christ's nature and person and work explains that fact, and saves Him from the charge of folly and blasphemy? ‘He that believeth upon Me shall never hunger.’ Ah, my brother! He was no mere *man* who said that. He that spake from out of the cloud to the Apostle on the road to Damascus, and said, ‘Sanctified by faith that is in Me,’ was no mere *man*. Christ was our brother and a man, but He was the Son of God, the divine Redeemer. The Object of faith is Christ; and as Object of faith He must needs be divine.

II. And now, secondly, closely connected with and springing from this thought as to the true object of faith, arises the consideration as to the nature and the essence of the act of faith itself.

Whom we are to trust in we have seen: what it is to *have* faith may be very briefly stated. If the Object of faith were certain truths, the assent of the understanding would be enough. If the Object of faith were unseen things, the confident persuasion of them would be sufficient. If the Object of faith were promises of future good, the hope rising to certainty of the possession of these would be sufficient. But if the Object be more than truths, more than unseen realities, more than promises; if the Object be a living Person,—then there follows inevitably this, that faith is not merely the assent of the understanding, that faith is not merely the persuasion of the reality of unseen things, that faith is not merely the confident expectation of future good; but that faith is the personal relation of him who has it to the living Person its Object,—the relation which is expressed not more clearly, but

perhaps a little more forcibly to us, by substituting another word, and saying, Faith is *trust*.

And I think that there again, by laying hold of that simple principle, Because Christ is the Object of Faith, therefore Faith must be trust, we get bright and beautiful light upon the grandest truths of the Gospel of God. If we will only take that as our explanation, we have not indeed defined faith by substituting the other word for it, but we have made it a little more clear to our apprehensions, by using a non-theological word with which our daily acts teach us to connect an intelligible meaning. If we will only take that as our explanation, how simple, how grand, how familiar too it sounds,—to *trust* Him! It is the very same kind of feeling, though different in degree, and glorified by the majesty and glory of its Object, as that which we all know how to put forth in our relations with one another. We trust each other. That is faith. We have confidence in the love that has been around us, breathing benedictions and bringing blessings ever since we were little children. When the child looks up into the mother's face, the symbol to it of all protection, or into the father's eye, the symbol to it of all authority, —that emotion by which the little one hangs upon the loving hand and trusts the loving heart that towers above it in order to bend over it and scatter good, is the same as the one which, glorified and made divine, rises strong and immortal in its power, when fixed and fastened on Christ, and saves the soul. The Gospel rests upon a mystery, but the practical part of it is no mystery. When we come and preach to you, 'Trust in Christ and thou shalt be saved,' we are not asking you to put into exercise some mysterious power. We are only asking you to give to Him that which you give to

others, to transfer the old emotions, the blessed emotions, the exercise of which makes gladness in life here below, to transfer them to Him, and to rest safe in the Lord. Faith is trust. The living Person as its Object rises before us there, in His majesty, in His power, in His gentleness, and He says, ‘I shall be contented if thou wilt give to Me these emotions which thou dost fix now, to thy death and loss, on the creatures of a day.’ Faith is mighty, divine, the gift of God; but Oh! it is the exercise of a familiar habit, only fixed upon a divine and eternal Person.

And if this be the very heart and kernel of the Christian doctrine of faith—that it is simple personal trust in Jesus Christ; it is worthy of notice, how all the subsidiary meanings and uses of the word flow out of that, whilst it cannot be explained by any of them. People are in the habit of setting up antitheses betwixt faith and reason, betwixt faith and sight, betwixt faith and possession. They say, ‘We do not *know*, we must *believe*'; they say, ‘We do not *see*, we must have faith'; they say, ‘We do not *possess*, we must trust.' Now faith—the trust in Christ—the simple personal relation of confidence in Him—that lies beneath all these other meanings of the word. For instance, faith is, in one sense, the opposite and antithesis of sight; because Christ, unseen, having gone into the unseen world, the confidence which is directed towards Him must needs pass out beyond the region of sense, and fix upon the immortal verities that are veiled by excess of light at God's right hand. Faith is the opposite of sight; inasmuch as Christ, having given us assurance of an unseen and everlasting world, we, trusting in Him, believe what He says to us, and are persuaded and know that there are things yonder which we have

never seen with the eye nor handled with the hand. Similarly, faith is the completion of reason; because, trusting Christ, we believe what He says, and He has spoken to us truths which we in ourselves are unable to discover, but which, when revealed, we accept on the faith of His truthfulness, and because we rely upon Him. Similarly, faith is contrasted with present possession, because Christ has promised us future blessings and future glories; and having confidence in the Person, we believe what He says, and know that we shall possess them. But the root from which spring the power of faith as the opposite of sight, the power of faith as the telescope of reason, the power of faith as the 'confidence of things not possessed,' is the deeper thing—faith in the Person, which leads us to believe Him whether He promises, reveals, or commands, and to take His words as verity because He is 'the Truth.'

And then, again, if this, the personal trust in Christ as our living Redeemer—if this be faith, then there come also, closely connected with it, certain other emotions or feelings in the heart. For instance, if I am trusting to Christ, there is inseparably linked with it self-distrust. There are two sides to the emotion; where there is reliance upon another, there must needs be non-reliance upon self. Take an illustration. There is the tree: the trunk goes upward from the little seed, rises into the light, gets the sunshine upon it, and has leaves and fruit. That is the upward tendency of faith—trust in Christ. There is the root, down deep, buried, dark, unseen. Both are springing, but springing in opposite directions, from the one seed. That is, as it were, the negative side, the downward tendency—self-distrust. The two things go together—the positive reliance upon another, the negative distrust of myself.

There must be deep consciousness not only of my own impotence, but of my own sinfulness. The heart must be emptied that the seed of faith may grow; but the entrance in of faith is itself the means for the emptying of the heart. The two things co-exist; we can divide them in thought. We can wrangle and squabble, as divided sects have done, about which comes first, the fact being, that though you can part them in thought, you cannot part them in experience, inasmuch as they are but the obverse and the reverse, the two sides of the same coin. Faith and repentance—faith and self-distrust—they are done in one and the same indissoluble act.

And again, faith, as thus conceived of, will obviously have for its certain and immediate consequence, love. Nay, the two emotions will be inseparable and practically co-existent. In thought we can separate them. Logically, faith comes first, and love next, but in life they will spring up together. The question of their order of existence is an often-trod battle-ground of theology, all strewed with the relics of former fights. But in the real history of the growth of religious emotions in the soul, the interval which separates them is impalpable, and in every act of trust, love is present, and fundamental to every emotion of love to Christ is trust in Christ.

But without further reference to such matters, here is the broad principle of our text. Trust in Christ, not mere assent to a principle, personal dependence upon Him revealed as the ‘Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,’ an act of the will as well as of the understanding, and essentially an act of the will and not of the understanding—that is the thing by which a soul is saved. And much of the mist and confusion

about saving faith, and non-saving faith, might be lifted and dispersed if we once fully apprehended and firmly held by the divine simplicity of the truth, that faith is trust in Jesus Christ.

III. Once more: from this general definition there follows, in the third place, an explanation of the power of faith.

'We are justified,' says the Bible, 'by faith.' If a man believes, he is saved. Why so? Not, as some people sometimes seem to fancy, as if in faith itself there was any merit. There is a very strange and subtle resurrection of the whole doctrine of works in reference to this matter; and we often hear belief in the Gospel of Christ spoken about as if *it*, the work of the man believing, was, in a certain way and to some extent, that which God rewarded by giving him salvation. What is that but the whole doctrine of works come up again in a new form? What difference is there between what a man does with his hands and what a man feels in his heart? If the one merit salvation, or if the other merit salvation, equally we are shut up to this,—Men get heaven by what they do; and it does not matter a bit what they do it with, whether it be body or soul. When we say we are saved by faith, we mean accurately, *through* faith. It is God that saves. It is Christ's life, Christ's blood, Christ's sacrifice, Christ's intercession, that saves. Faith is simply the channel through which there flows over into my emptiness the divine fulness; or, to use the good old illustration, it is the hand which is held up to receive the benefit which Christ lays in it. A living trust in Jesus has power unto salvation, only because it is the means by which 'the power of God unto salvation' may come into my heart. On one side

is the great ocean of Christ's love, Christ's abundance, Christ's merits, Christ's righteousness; or, rather, there is the great ocean of Christ Himself, which includes them all; and on the other is the empty vessel of my soul—and the little narrow pipe that has nothing to do but to bring across the refreshing water, is the act of faith in Him. There is no merit in the dead lead, no virtue in the mere emotion. It is not faith that saves us; it is Christ that saves us, and saves us through faith.

And now, lastly, these principles likewise help us to understand wherein consists the guilt and criminality of unbelief. People are sometimes disposed to fancy that God has arbitrarily selected this one thing, believing in Jesus Christ, as the means of salvation, and do not distinctly see why and how non-belief is so desperate and criminal a thing. I think that the principles that I have been trying feebly to work out now, help us to see how faith is not arbitrarily selected as the instrument and means of our salvation. There is no other way of effecting it. God could not save us in any other way than that, salvation being provided, the condition of receiving it should be trust in His Son.

And next they show where the guilt of unbelief lies. Faith is not first and principally an act of the understanding; it is not the mere assent to certain truths. I believe, for my part, that men are responsible even for their intellectual processes, and for the beliefs at which they arrive by the working of these; and I think it is a very shallow philosophy that stands up and says—(it is almost exploded now, and perhaps not needful even to mention it)—that men are ‘no more responsible for their belief than they are for the colour of their hair.’ Why, if faith were no more than an intellectual process, it would still be true that they are

responsible for it; but the faith that saves a man, and unbelief that ruins a man, are not processes of the understanding alone. It is the will, the heart, the whole moral being, that is concerned. Why does any one not trust Jesus Christ? For one reason only: because *he will not*. Why has any one not faith in the Lamb of God? Because his whole nature is turning away from that divine and loving Face, and is setting itself in rebellion against it. Why does any one refuse to believe? Because he has confidence in himself; because he has not a sense of his sins; because he has not love in his heart to his Lord and Saviour. Men *are* responsible for unbelief. Unbelief is criminal, because it is a moral act—an act of the whole nature. Belief or unbelief is the test of a man's whole spiritual condition, just because it is the whole being, affections, will, conscience and all, as well as the understanding, which are concerned in it. And therefore Christ, who says, 'Sanctified by faith that is in Me,' says likewise, 'He that believeth not, shall be condemned.'

And now, brethren, take this one conviction into your hearts, that what makes a man a Christian—what saves my soul and yours—what brings the love of Christ into any life, and makes the sacrifice of Christ a power to pardon and purify,—that that is not merely believing this Book, not merely understanding the doctrines that are there, but a far more profound act than that. It is the casting of myself upon Himself, the bending of my willing heart to His loving Spirit; the close contact, heart to heart, soul to soul, will to will, of my emptiness with His fulness, of my sinfulness with His righteousness, of my death with His life: that I may live by Him, be sanctified by Him, be saved by Him, 'with an everlasting salvation.' Faith

is trust: Christ is the Object of faith. Faith is the condition of salvation; and unbelief is your fault, your loss—the crime which ruins men's souls!

'BEFORE GOVERNORS AND KINGS'

'Wherupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20. But shewed first unto them of Damaseus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. 21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; 23. That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. 24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. 30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.'—ACTS xxvi. 19-32.

FESTUS was no model of a righteous judge, but he had got hold of the truth as to Paul, and saw that what he contemptuously called 'certain questions of their own superstition,' and especially his assertion of the Resurrection, were the real crimes of the Apostle in Jewish eyes. But the fatal wish to curry favour warped his course, and led him to propose a removal of the 'venue' to Jerusalem. Paul knew that to return thither would seal his death-warrant, and was therefore driven to appeal to Rome.

That took the case out of Festus's jurisdiction. So that the hearing before Agrippa was an entertainment, got up for the king's diversion, when other amusements had been exhausted, rather than a regular judicial

proceeding. Paul was examined 'to make a Roman holiday.' Festus's speech (chap. xxv. 24-27) tries to put on a colour of desire to ascertain more clearly the charges, but that is a very thin pretext. Agrippa had said that he would like 'to hear the man,' and so the performance was got up 'by request.' Not a very sympathetic audience fronted Paul that day. A king and his sister, a Roman governor, and all the *élite* of Cæsarean society, ready to take their cue from the faces of these three, did not daunt Paul. The man who had seen Jesus on the Damascus road could face 'small and great.'

The portion of his address included in the passage touches substantially the same points as did his previous 'apologies.' We may note how strongly he puts the force that impelled him on his course, and lays bare the secret of his life. 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision'; then the possibility of disobedience was open after he had heard Christ ask, 'Why persecutest thou Me?' and had received commands from His mouth. Then, too, the essential character of the charge against him was that, instead of kicking against the owner's goad, he had bowed his neck to his yoke, and that his obstinate will had melted. Then, too, the 'light above the brightness of the sun' still shone round him, and his whole life was one long act of obedience.

We note also how he sums up his work in verse 20, representing his mission to the Gentiles as but the last term in a continuous widening of his field, from Damascus to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Judæa (a phase of his activity not otherwise known to us, and for which, with our present records, it is difficult to find a place), from Judæa to the Gentiles. Step by step

he had been led afield, and at each step the ‘heavenly vision’ had shone before him.

How superbly, too, Paul overleaps the distinction of Jew and Gentile, which disappeared to him in the unity of the broad message, which was the same to every man. Repentance, turning to God, works worthy of repentance, are as needful for Jew as for Gentile, and as open to Gentile as to Jew. What but universal can such a message be? To limit it would be to mutilate it.

We note, too, the calmness with which he lays his finger on the real cause of Jewish hate, which Festus had already found out. He does not condescend to rebut the charge of treason, which he had already repelled, and which nobody in his audience believed. He is neither afraid nor angry, as he quietly points to the deadly malice which had no ground but his message.

We further note the triumphant confidence in God and assurance of His help in all the past, so that, like some strong tower after the most crashing blows of the battering-ram, he still ‘stands.’ ‘His steps had wellnigh slipped,’ when foe after foe stormed against him, but ‘Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.’

Finally, Paul gathers himself together, to leave as his last word the mighty sentence in which he condenses his whole teaching, in its aspect of witness-bearing, in its universal destination and identity to the poorest and to loftily placed men and women, such as sat languidly looking at him now, in its perfect concord with the earlier revelation, and in its threefold contents, that it was the message of the Christ who suffered, who rose from the dead, who was the Light of the world. Surely the promise was fulfilled to him, and it was ‘given him in that hour what he should speak.’

The rustle in the crowd was scarcely over, when the strong masterful voice of the governor rasped out the coarse taunt, which, according to one reading, was made coarser (and more lifelike) by repetition, 'Thou art mad, Paul; thou art mad.' So did a hard 'practical man' think of that strain of lofty conviction, and of that story of the appearance of the Christ. To be in earnest about wealth or power or science or pleasure is not madness, so the world thinks; but to be in earnest about religion, one's own soul, or other people's, is. Which was the saner, Paul, who 'counted all things but dung that he might win Christ,' or Festus, who counted keeping his governorship, and making all that he could out of it, the one thing worth living for? Who is the madman, he who looks up and sees Jesus, and bows before Him for lifelong service, or he who looks up and says, 'I see nothing up there; I keep my eyes on the main chance down here'? It would be a saner and a happier world if there were more of us mad after Paul's fashion.

Paul's unruffled calm and dignity brushed aside the rude exclamation with a simple affirmation that his words were true in themselves, and spoken by one who had full command over his faculties; and then he turned away from Festus, who understood nothing, to Agrippa, who, at any rate, did understand a little. Indeed, Festus has to take the second place throughout, and it may have been the ignoring of him that nettled him. For all his courtesy to Agrippa, he knew that the latter was but a vassal king, and may have chafed at Paul's addressing him exclusively.

The Apostle has finished his defence, and now he towers above the petty dignitaries before him, and goes

straight at the conscience of the king. Festus had dismissed the Resurrection of ‘one Jesus’ as unimportant: Paul asserted it, the Jews denied it. It was not worth while to ask which was right. The man was dead, that was agreed. If Paul said He was alive after death, that was only another proof of madness, and a Roman governor had more weighty things to occupy him than investigating such obscure and absurd trifles. But Agrippa, though not himself a Jew, knew enough of the history of the last twenty years to have heard about the Resurrection and the rise of the Church. No doubt he would have been ready to admit his knowledge, but Paul shows a disposition to come to closer quarters by his swift thrust, ‘Believest thou the prophets?’ and the confident answer which the questioner gives.

What was the Apostle bringing these two things—the publicity given to the facts of Christ’s life, and the belief in the prophets—together for? Obviously, if Agrippa said Yes, then the next question would be, ‘Believest thou the Christ, whose life and death and resurrection thou knowest, and who has fulfilled the prophets thereby?’ That would have been a hard question for the king to answer. His conscience begins to be uncomfortable, and his dignity is wounded by this extremely rude person, who ventures to talk to him as if he were a mere common man. He has no better answer ready than a sarcasm; not a very forcible one, betraying, however, his penetration into, and his dislike of, and his embarrassment at, Paul’s drift. His ironical words are no confession of being ‘almost persuaded,’ but a taunt. ‘And do you really suppose that it is so easy a matter to turn me—the great Me, a Herod, a king,’ and he

might have added, a sensual bad man, 'into a Christian?'

Paul met the sarcastic jest with deep earnestness, which must have hushed the audience of sycophants ready to laugh with the king, and evidently touched him and Festus. His whole soul ran over in yearning desire for the salvation of them all. He took no notice of the gibe in the word *Christian*, nor of the levity of Agrippa. He showed that purest love fills his heart, that he has found the treasure which enriches the poorest and adds blessedness to the highest. So peaceful and blessed is he, a prisoner, that he can wish nothing better for any than to be like him in his faith. He hints his willingness to take any pains and undergo any troubles for such an end; and, with almost a smile, he looks at his chains, and adds, 'except these bonds.'

Did Festus wince a little at the mention of these, which ought not to have been on his wrists? At all events, the entertainment had taken rather too serious a turn for the taste of any of the three,—Festus, Agrippa, or Bernice. If this strange man was going to shake their consciences in that fashion, it was high time to end what was, after all, as far as the rendering of justice was concerned, something like a farce.

So with a rustle, and amid the obeisances of the courtiers, the three rose, and, followed by the principal people, went through the form of deliberation. There was only one conclusion to be come to. He was perfectly innocent. So Agrippa solemnly pronounced, what had been known before, that he had done nothing worthy of death or bonds, though he had 'these bonds' on his arms; and salved the injustice of keeping an innocent man in custody by throwing all the blame on

Paul himself for appealing to Cæsar. But the person to blame was Festus, who had forced Paul to appeal in order to save his life.

'THE HEAVENLY VISION'

'Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'

ACTS xxvi. 19.

THIS is Paul's account of the decisive moment in his life on which all his own future, and a great deal of the future of Christianity and of the world, hung. The gracious voice had spoken from heaven, and now everything depended on the answer made in the heart of the man lying there blind and amazed. Will he rise melted by love, and softened into submission, or hardened by resistance to the call of the exalted Lord? The somewhat singular expression which he employs in the text, makes us spectators of the very process of his yielding. For it might be rendered, with perhaps an advantage, '*I became* not disobedient'; as if the 'disobedience' was the prior condition, from which we see him in the very act of passing, by the melting of his nature and the yielding of his will. Surely there have been few decisions in the world's history big with larger destinies than that which the captive described to Agrippa in the simple words: '*I became* not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'

I. Note, then, first, that this heavenly vision shines for us too.

Paul throughout his whole career looked back to the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ in the heavens, as being equally available as valid ground for his

Christian convictions as were the appearances of the Lord in bodily form to the Eleven after His resurrection. And I may venture to work the parallel in the inverse direction, and to say to you that what we see and know of Jesus Christ is as valid a ground for our convictions, and as true and powerful a call for our obedience, as when the heaven was rent, and the glory above the midday sun bathed the persecutor and his followers on the stony road to Damascus. For the revelation that is made to the understanding and the heart, to the spirit and the will, is the same whether it be made, as it was to Paul, through a heavenly vision, or, as it was to the other Apostles, through the facts of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, which their senses certified to them, or, as it is to us, by the record of the same facts, permanently enshrined in Scripture. Paul's sight of Christ was for a moment; we can see Him as often and as long as we will, by turning to the pages of this Book. Paul's sight of Christ was accompanied with but a partial apprehension of the great and far-reaching truths which he was to learn and to teach, as embodied in the Lord whom he saw. To see Him was the work of a moment, to 'know Him' was the effort of a lifetime. We have the abiding results of the lifelong process lying ready to our hands in Paul's own letters, and we have not only the permanent record of Christ in the Gospels instead of the transient vision in the heavens, and the unfolding of the meaning and bearings of the historical facts, in the authoritative teaching of the Epistles, but we have also, in the history of the Church founded on these, in the manifest workings of a divine power for and through the company of believers, as well as in the correspondence between the facts and doctrines of

Christianity and the wants of humanity, a vision disclosed and authenticated as heavenly, more developed, fuller of meaning and more blessed to the eyes which see it, than that which was revealed to the persecutor as he reeled from his horse on the way to the great city.

Dear brethren, they who see Christ in the word, in the history of the world, in the pleading of the preacher, in the course of the ages, and who sometimes hear His voice in the warnings which He breathes into their consciences, and in the illuminations which He flashes on their understanding, need ask for no loftier, no more valid and irrefragable manifestation of His gracious self. To each of us this vision is granted. May I say, without seeming egotism to you it is granted even through the dark and cloudy envelope of my poor words?

II. The vision of Christ, howsoever perceived, comes demanding obedience.

The purpose for which Jesus Christ made Himself known to Paul was to give him a charge which should influence his whole life. And the manner in which the Lord, when He had appeared, prepared the way for the charge was twofold. He revealed Himself in His radiant glory, in His exalted being, in His sympathetic and mysterious unity with them that loved Him and trusted Him, in His knowledge of the doings of the persecutor; and He disclosed to Saul the inmost evil that lurked in his own heart, and showed him to his bewilderment and confusion, how the course that he thought to be righteousness and service was blasphemy and sin. So, by the manifestation of Himself enthroned omniscient, bound by the closest ties of identity and of sympathy with all that love Him, and by the disclosure of the amazed gazer's evil and sin, Jesus Christ opened

the way for the charge which bore in its very heart an assurance of pardon, and was itself a manifestation of His love.

In like manner all heavenly visions are meant to secure human obedience. We have not done what God means us to do with any knowledge of Him which He grants, unless we utilise it to drive the wheels of life and carry it out into practice in our daily conduct. Revelation is not meant to satisfy mere curiosity or the idle desire to know. It shines above us like the stars, but, unlike them, it shines to be the guide of our lives. And whatsoever glimpse of the divine nature, or of Christ's love, nearness, and power, we have ever caught, was meant to bow our wills in glad submission, and to animate our hands for diligent service and to quicken our feet to run in the way of His commandments.

There is plenty of idle gazing, with more or less of belief, at the heavenly vision. I beseech you to lay to heart this truth, that Christ rends the heavens and shows us God, not that men may know, but that men may, knowing, do; and all His visions are the bases of commandments. So the question for us all is, What are we doing with what we know of Jesus Christ? Nothing? Have we translated our thoughts of Him into actions, and have we put all our actions under the control of our thoughts of Him? It is not enough that a man should say, 'Whereupon I *saw* the vision,' or, 'Whereupon I was *convinced* of the vision,' or, 'Whereupon I *understood* the vision.' Sight, apprehension, theology, orthodoxy, they are all very well, but the right result is, 'Whereupon I was *not obedient* to the heavenly vision.' And unless your knowledge of Christ makes you do, and keep from

doing, a thousand things, it is only an idle vision, which adds to your guilt.

But notice, in this connection, the peculiarity of the obedience which the vision requires. There is not a word, in this story of Paul's conversion, about the thing which Paul himself always puts in the foreground as the very hinge upon which conversion turns—viz. faith. Not a word. The name is not here, but the thing is here, if people will look. For the obedience which Paul says that he rendered to the vision was not rendered with his hands. He got up to his feet on the road there, ‘not disobedient,’ though he had not yet done anything. This is to say, the man's will had melted. It had all gone with a run, so to speak, and the inmost being of him was subdued. The obedience was the submission of self to God, and not the more or less diligent and continuous consequent external activity in the way of God's commandments.

Further, Paul's obedience is also an obedience based upon the vision of Jesus Christ enthroned, living, bound by ties that thrill at the slightest touch to all hearts that love Him, and making common cause with them.

And furthermore, it is an obedience based upon the shuddering recognition of Paul's own unsuspected evil and foulness, how all the life, that he had thought was being built up into a temple that God would inhabit, was rottenness and falsehood.

And it is an obedience, further, built upon the recognition of pity and pardon in Christ, who, after His sharp denunciation of the sin, looks down from Heaven with a smile of forgiveness upon His lips, and says: ‘But rise and stand upon thy feet, for I will send thee to make known My name.’

An obedience which is the inward yielding of the

will, which is all built upon the revelation of the living Christ, who was dead and is alive for evermore, and close to all His followers ; and is, further, the thankful tribute of a heart that knows itself to be sinful, and is certain that it is forgiven—what is that but the obedience which is of faith ? And thus, when I say that the heavenly vision demands obedience, I do not mean that Christ shows Himself to you to set you to work, but I mean that Christ shows Himself to you that you may yield yourselves to Him, and in the act may receive power to do all His sweet and sacred will.

III. Thirdly, this obedience is in our own power to give or to withhold.

Paul, as I said in my introductory remarks, puts us here as spectators of the very act of submission. He shows it to us in its beginning—he shows us the state from which he came and that into which he passed, and he tells us, ‘I *became*—not disobedient.’ In his case it was a complete, swift, and permanent revolution, as if some thick-ribbed ice should all at once melt into sweet water. But whether swift or slow it was his own act, and after the Voice had spoken it was possible that Paul should have resisted and risen from the ground, not a servant, but a persecutor still. For God’s grace constrains no man, and there is always the possibility open that when He calls we refuse, and that when He beseeches we say, ‘I will not.’

There is the mystery on which the subtlest intellects have tasked their powers and blunted the edge of their keenness in all generations ; and it is not likely to be settled in five minutes of a sermon of mine. But the practical point that I have to urge is simply this : there are two mysteries, the one that men *can*, and the other that men *do*, resist Christ’s pleading voice.

As to the former, we cannot fathom it. But do not let any difficulty deaden to you the clear voice of your own consciousness. If I cannot trust my sense that I can do this thing or not do it, as I choose, there is nothing that I can trust. Will is the power of determining which of two roads I shall go, and, strange as it is, incapable of statement in any more general terms than the reiteration of the fact ; yet here stands the fact, that God, the infinite Will, has given to men, whom He made in His own image, this inexplicable and awful power of coinciding with or opposing His purposes and His voice.

‘Our wills are ours, we know not how ;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.’

For the other mystery is, that men *do* consciously set themselves against the will of God, and refuse the gifts which they know all the while are for their good. It is of no use to say that sin is ignorance. No ; that is only a surface explanation. You and I know too well that many a time when we have been as sure of what God wanted us to do as if we had seen it written in flaming letters on the sky there, we have gone and done the exact opposite. I know that there are men and women who are convinced in their inmost souls that they ought to be Christians, and that Jesus Christ is pleading with them at the present hour, and yet in whose hearts there is no yielding to what, they yet are certain, is the will and voice of Jesus Christ.

IV. Lastly, this obedience may, in a moment, revolutionise a life.

Paul rode from Jerusalem ‘breathing out threatenings and slaughters.’ He fell from his warhorse, a persecutor of Christians, and a bitter enemy of Jesus. A few moments pass. There was one moment in

which the crucial decision was made; and he staggered to his feet, loving all that he had hated, and abandoning all in which he had trusted. His own doctrine that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things are become new,' is but a generalisation of what befell himself on the Damascus road. It is of no use trying to say that there had been a warfare going on in this man's mind long before, of which his complete capitulation was only the final visible outcome. There is not a trace of anything of the kind in the story. It is a pure hypothesis pressed into the service of the anti-supernatural explanation of the fact.

There are plenty of analogies of such sudden and entire revolution. All reformation of a moral kind is best done quickly. It is a very hopeless task, as every one knows, to tell a drunkard to break off his habits gradually. There must be one moment in which he definitely turns himself round and sets his face in the other direction. Some things are best done with slow, continuous pressure; other things need to be done with a wrench if they are to be done at all.

There used to be far too much insistence upon one type of religious experience, and all men that were to be recognised as Christians were, by evangelical Nonconformists, required to be able to point to the moment when, by some sudden change, they passed from darkness to light. We have drifted away from that very far now, and there is need for insisting, not upon the necessity, but upon the possibility, of sudden conversions. However some may try to show that such experiences cannot be, the experience of every earnest Christian teacher can answer—well! whether they can be or not, they are. Jesus Christ cured two

men gradually, and all the others instantaneously. No doubt, for young people who have been born amidst Christian influences, and have grown up in Christian households, the usual way of becoming Christians is that slowly and imperceptibly they shall pass into the consciousness of communion with Jesus Christ. But for people who have grown up irreligious and, perhaps, profligate and sinful, the most probable way is a sudden stride out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So I come to you all with this message. No matter what your past, no matter how much of your life may have ebbed away, no matter how deeply rooted and obstinate may be your habits of evil, no matter how often you may have tried to mend yourself and have failed, it is possible by one swift act of surrender to break the chains and go free. In every man's life there have been moments into which years have been crowded, and which have put a wider gulf between his past and his present self than many slow, languid hours can dig. A great sorrow, a great joy, a great, newly discerned truth, a great resolve will make 'one day as a thousand years.' Men live through such moments and feel that the past is swallowed up as by an earthquake. The highest instance of thus making time elastic and crowding it with meaning is when a man forms and keeps the swift resolve to yield himself to Christ. It may be the work of a moment, but it makes a gulf between past and future, like that which parted the time before and the time after that in which 'God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' If you have never yet bowed before the heavenly vision and yielded yourself as conquered by the love which pardons, to be the glad servant of the Lord Jesus who takes all His

servants into wondrous oneness with Himself, do it now. You can do it. Delay is disobedience, and may be death. Do it now, and your whole life will be changed. Peace and joy and power will come to you, and you, made a new man, will move in a new world of new relations, duties, energies, loves, gladnesses, helps, and hopes. If you take heed to prolong the point into a line, and hour by hour to renew the surrender and the cry, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' you will ever have the vision of the Christ enthroned, pardoning, sympathising, and commanding, which will fill your sky with glory, point the path of your feet, and satisfy your gaze with His beauty, and your heart with His all-sufficing and ever-present love.

'ME A CHRISTIAN!'

'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'
ACTS xxvi. 28.

THIS Agrippa was son of the other Herod of whom we hear in the Acts as a persecutor. This one appears, from other sources, to have had the vices but not the force of character of his bad race. He was weak and indolent, a mere hanger-on of Rome, to which he owed his kingdom, and to which he stoutly stuck during all the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem. In position and in character (largely resulting from the position) he was uncommonly like those semi-independent rajahs in India, who are allowed to keep up a kind of shadow of authority on condition of doing what Calcutta bids them. Of course frivolity and debauchery become the business of such men. What

sort of a man this was may be sufficiently inferred from the fact that Bernice was his sister.

But he knew a good deal about the Jews, about their opinions, their religion, and about what had been going on during the last half century amongst them. On grounds of policy he professed to accept the Jewish faith—of which an edifying example is given in the fact that, on one occasion, Bernice was prevented from accompanying him to Rome because she was fulfilling a Nazarite vow in the Temple at Jerusalem!

So the Apostle was fully warranted in appealing to Agrippa's knowledge, not only of Judaism, but of the history of Jesus Christ, and in his further assertion, 'I know that thou believest.' But the home-thrust was too much for the king. His answer is given in the words of our text.

They are very familiar words, and they have been made the basis of a great many sermons upon being all but persuaded to accept of Christ as Saviour. But, edifying as such a use of them is, it can scarcely be sustained by their actual meaning. Most commentators are agreed that our 'Authorised Version does not represent either Agrippa's words or his tone. He was not speaking in earnest. His words are sarcasm, not a half melting into conviction, and the Revised Version gives what may, on the whole, be accepted as being a truer representation of their intention when it reads, 'With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian.'

He is half amused and half angry at the Apostle's presumption in supposing that so easily or so quickly he was going to land his fish. 'It is a more difficult task than you fancy, Paul, to make a Christian of a

man like me.' That is the real meaning of his words, and I think that, rightly understood, they yield lessons of no less value than those that have been so often drawn from them as they appear in our Authorised Version. So I wish to try and gather up and urge upon you now these lessons:—

I. First, then, I see here an example of the danger of a superficial familiarity with Christian truth.

As I said, Agrippa knew, in a general way, a good deal not only about the prophets and the Jewish religion, but of the outstanding facts of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's assumption that he knew would have been very quickly repudiated if it had not been based upon fact. And the inference from his acceptance without contradiction of the Apostle's statement is confirmed by his use of the word 'Christian,' which had by no means come into general employment when he spoke; and in itself indicates that he knew a good deal about the people who were so named. Mark the contrast, for instance, between him and the bluff Roman official at his side. To Festus, Paul's talking about a dead man's having risen, and a risen Jew becoming a light to all nations, was such utter nonsense that, with characteristic Roman contempt for men with ideas, he breaks in, with his rough, strident voice, 'Much learning has made thee mad.' There was not much chance of that cause producing that effect on Festus. But he was apparently utterly bewildered at this entirely novel and unintelligible sort of talk. Agrippa, on the other hand, knows all about the Resurrection; has heard that there was such a thing, and has a general rough notion of what Paul believed as a Christian.

And was he any better for it? No; he was a great

deal worse. It took the edge off a good deal of his curiosity. It made him fancy that he knew beforehand all that the Apostle had to say. It stood in the way of his apprehending the truths which he thought that he understood.

And although the world knows a great deal more about Jesus Christ and the Gospel than he did, the very same thing is true about hundreds and thousands of people who have all their lives long been brought into contact with Christianity. Superficial knowledge is the worst enemy of accurate knowledge, for the first condition of knowing a thing is to know that we do not know it. And so there are a great many of us who, having picked up since childhood vague and partially inaccurate notions about Christ and His Gospel and what He has done, are so satisfied on the strength of these that we know all about it, that we listen to preaching about it with a very languid attention. The ground in our minds is preoccupied with our own vague and imperfect apprehensions. I believe that there is nothing that stands more in the way of hundreds of people coming into real intelligent contact with Gospel truth than the half knowledge that they have had of it ever since they were children. You fancy that you know all that I can tell you. Very probably you do. But have you ever taken a firm hold of the plain central facts of Christianity—your own sinfulness and helplessness, your need of a Saviour, the perfect work of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for you, and the power of simple faith therein to join you to Him, and, if followed by consecration and obedience, to make you partakers of His nature, and heirs of the inheritance that is above? These are but the fundamentals, the outlines of

Gospel truth. But far too many of you see them, in such a manner as you see the figures cast upon a screen when the lantern is not rightly focussed, with a blurred outline, and the blurred outline keeps you from seeing the sharp-cut truth as it is in Jesus. In all regions of thought inaccurate knowledge is the worst foe to further understanding, and eminently is this the case in religion. Brethren, some of you are in that position.

Then there is another way in which such knowledge as that of which the king in our text is an example is a hindrance, and that is, that it is knowledge which has no effect on character. What do hundreds of us do with our knowledge of Christianity? Our minds seem built in watertight compartments, and we keep the doors of them shut very close, so that truths in the understanding have no influence on the will. Many of you believe the Gospel intellectually, and it does not make a hairsbreadth of difference to anything that you ever either thought or wished or did. And because you so believe it, it is utterly impossible that it should ever be of any use to you. ‘Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.’ ‘Yes, believest the prophets, and Bernice sitting by thy side there—believest the prophets, and livest in utter bestial godlessness.’ What is the good of a knowledge of Christianity like that? And is it not such knowledge of Christianity that blocks the way with some of you for anything more real and more operative? There is nothing more impotent than a firmly believed and utterly neglected truth. And that is what the Christianity of some of you is when it is analysed.

II. Now, secondly, notice how we have here the

example of a proud man indignantly recoiling from submission.

There is a world of contempt in Agrippa's words, in the very putting side by side of the two things. 'Me! Me,' with a very large capital M—'Me a Christian?' He thinks of his dignity, poor creature. It was not such a very tremendous dignity after all. He was a petty kinglet, permitted by the grace of Rome to live and to pose as if he were the real thing, and yet he struts and claps his wings and crows on his little hillock as if it were a mountain. 'Me a Christian?' 'The great Agrippa a *Christian*!' And he uses that word 'Christian' with the intense contempt which coined it and adhered to it, until the men to whom it was applied were wise enough to take it and bind it as a crown of honour upon their head. The wits at Antioch first of all hit upon the designation. They meant a very exquisite piece of sarcasm by their nickname. These people were 'Christians,' just as some other people were Herodians—Christ's men, the men of this impostor who pretended to be a Messiah. That seemed such an intensely ludicrous thing to the wise people in Antioch that they coined the name; and no doubt thought they had done a very clever thing. It is only used in the Bible in the notice of its origin; here, with a very evident connotation of contempt; and once more when Peter in his letter refers to it as being the indictment on which certain disciples suffered. So when Agrippa says, 'Me a Christian,' he puts all the bitterness that he can into that last word. As if he said, 'Do you really think that I—I—am going to bow myself down to be a follower and adherent of that Christ of yours? The thing is too ridiculous! With but little persuasion you would fain make me

a Christian. But you will find it a harder task than you fancy.'

Now, my dear friends, the shape of this unwillingness is changed but the fact of it remains. There are two or three features of what I take to be the plain Gospel of Jesus Christ which grate very much against all self-importance and self-complacency, and operate very largely, though not always consciously, upon very many amongst us. I just run them over, very briefly.

The Gospel insists on dealing with everybody in the same fashion, and on regarding all as standing on the same level. Many of us do not like that. Translate Agrippa's scorn into words that fit ourselves: 'I am a well-to-do Manchester man. Am I to stand on the same level as my office-boy?' Yes! the very same. 'I, a student, perhaps a teacher of science, or a cultivated man, a scholar, a lawyer, a professional man—am I to stand on the same level as people that scarcely know how to read and write?' Yes, exactly. So, like the man in the Old Testament, 'he turned and went away in a rage.' Many of us would like that there should be a little private door for us in consideration of our position or acquirements or respectability, or this, that, or the other thing. At any rate we are not to be classed in the same category with the poor and the ignorant and the sinful and the savage all over the world. But we are so classed. Do not you and the men in Patagonia breathe the same air? Are not your bodies subject to the same laws? Have you not to be contented to be fed in the same fashion, and to sleep and eat and drink in the same way? 'We have all of us one human heart'; and 'there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the

glory of God.' The identities of humanity, in all its examples, are deeper than the differences in any. We have all the one Saviour and are to be saved in the same fashion. That is a humbling thing for those of us who stand upon some little elevation, real or fancied, but it is only the other side of the great truth that God's love is world-wide, and that Christ's Gospel is meant for humanity. Naaman, to whom I have already referred in passing, wanted to be treated as a great man who happened to be a leper; Elisha insisted on treating him as a leper who happened to be a great man. And that makes all the difference. I remember seeing somewhere that a great surgeon had said that the late Emperor of Germany would have had a far better chance of being cured if he had gone *incognito* to the hospital for throat diseases. We all need the same surgery, and we must be contented to take it in the same fashion. So, some of us recoil from humbling equality with the lowest and worst.

Then again, another thing that sometimes makes people shrink back from the Gospel is that it insists upon every one being saved solely by dependence on Another. We would like to have a part in our salvation, and many of us had rather do anything in the way of sacrifice or suffering or penance than take this position :

'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'

Corrupt forms of Christianity have taken an acute measure of the worst parts of human nature, when they have taught men that they can eke out Christ's work by their own, and have some kind of share in their own salvation. Dear brethren, I have to bring

to you another Gospel than that, and to say, All is done for us, and all will be done in us, and nothing has to be done by us. Some of you do not like that. Just as a man drowning is almost sure to try to help himself, and get his limbs inextricably twisted round his would-be rescuer and drown them both, so men will not, without a struggle, consent to owe everything to Jesus Christ, and to let Him draw them out of many waters and set them on the safe shore. But unless we do so, we have little share in His Gospel.

And another thing stands in the way—namely, that the Gospel insists upon absolute obedience to Jesus Christ. Agrippa fancied that it was an utterly preposterous idea that he should lower his flag, and doff his crown, and become the servant of a Jewish peasant. A great many of us, though we have a higher idea of our Lord than his, do yet find it quite as hard to submit our wills to His, and to accept the condition of absolute obedience, utter resignation to Him, and entire subjection to His commandment. We say, 'Let my own will have a little bit of play in a corner.' Some of us find it very hard to believe that we are to bring all our thinking upon religious and moral subjects to Him, and to accept His word as conclusive, settling all controversies. 'I, with my culture; am I to accept what Christ says as the end of strife?' Yes, absolute submission is the plainest condition of real Christianity. The very name tells us that. We are Christians, *i.e.* Christ's men; and unless we are, we have no right to the name. But some of us had rather be our own masters and enjoy the miseries of independence and self-will, and so be the slaves of our worse selves, than bow ourselves utterly before that dear

Lord, and so pass into the freedom of a service love-inspired, and by love accepted. ‘Thou wouldest fain persuade *me* to be a *Christian*,’ is the recoil of a proud heart from submission. Brethren, let me beseech you that it may not be yours.

III. Again, we have here an example of instinctive shrinking from the personal application of broad truths.

Agrippa listened, half-amused and a good deal interested, to Paul as long as he talked generalities and described his own experience. But when he came to point the generalities and to drive them home to the hearer’s heart it was time to stop him. That question of the Apostle’s, keen and sudden as the flash of a dagger, went straight home, and the king at once gathered himself together into an attitude of resistance. Ah, that is what hundreds of people do! You will let me preach as long as I like—only you will get a little weary sometimes—you will let me preach generalities *ad libitum*. But when I come to ‘And thou?’ then I am ‘rude’ and ‘inquisitorial’ and ‘personal’ and ‘trespassing on a region where I have no business,’ and so on and so on. And so you shut up your heart if not your ears.

And yet, brethren, what is the use of toothless generalities? What am I here for if I am not here to take these broad, blunt truths and sharpen them to a point, and try to get them in between the joints of your armour? Can any man faithfully preach the Gospel who is always flying over the heads of his hearers with universalities, and never goes straight to their hearts with ‘Thou—thou art the man!’ ‘Believest thou?’

And so, dear friends, let me press that question

upon you. Never mind about other people. Suppose you and I were alone together and my words were coming straight *to thee*. Would they not have more power than they have now? They are so coming. Think away all these other people, and this place, ay, and me too, and let the word of Christ, which deals with no crowds but with single souls, come to you in its individualising force: 'Believest thou?' You will have to answer that question one day. Better to face it now and try to answer it than to leave it all vague until you get yonder, where 'each one of us shall give account of *himself* to God.'

IV. Lastly, we have here an example of a soul close to the light, but passing into the dark.

Agrippa listens to Paul; Bernice listens; Festus listens. And what comes of it? Only this, 'And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man hath done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.' May I translate into a modern equivalent: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, 'This man preached a very impressive sermon,' or, 'This man preached a very wearisome sermon,' and there an end.

Agrippa and Bernice went their wicked way, and Festus went his, and none of them knew what a fateful moment they had passed through. Ah, brethren! there are many such in our lives when we make decisions that influence our whole future, and no sign shows that the moment is any way different from millions of its undistinguished fellows. It is eminently so in regard to our relation to Jesus Christ and His Gospel. These three had been in the light; they were never so near it again. Probably they never heard the Gospel preached any more, and they went away,

not knowing what they had done when they silenced Paul and left him. Now you will probably hear plenty of sermons in future. You may or you may not. But be sure of this, that if you go away from this one, unmelted and unbelieving, you have not done a trivial thing. You have added one more stone to the barrier that you yourself build to shut you out from holiness and happiness, from hope and heaven. It is not I that ask you the question, it is not Paul that asks it, Jesus Christ Himself says to you, as He said to the blind man, ‘Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ or as He said to the weeping sister of Lazarus, ‘Believest thou this?’ O dear friends, do not answer like this arrogant bit of a king, but cry with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!’

TEMPEST AND TRUST

And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. 14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. 16. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. 18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. 21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. 23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.’—*Actrs xxvii. 13-26.*

LUKE's minute account of the shipwreck implies that he was not a Jew. His interest in the sea and

familiarity with sailors' terms are quite unlike a persistent Jewish characteristic which still continues. We have a Jew's description of a storm at sea in the Book of Jonah, which is as evidently the work of a landsman as Luke's is of one who, though not a sailor, was well up in maritime matters. His narrative lays hold of the essential points, and is as accurate as it is vivid. This section has two parts: the account of the storm, and the grand example of calm trust and cheery encouragement given in Paul's words.

I. The consultation between the captain of the vessel and the centurion, at which Paul assisted, strikes us, with our modern notions of a captain's despotic power on his own deck, and single responsibility, as unnatural. But the centurion, as a military officer, was superior to the captain of an Alexandrian corn-ship, and Paul had already made his force of character so felt that it is not wonderful that he took part in the discussion. Naturally the centurion was guided by the professional rather than by the amateur member of the council, and the decision was come to to push on as far and fast as possible.

The ship was lying in a port which gave scanty protection against the winter weather, and it was clearly wise to reach a more secure harbour if possible. So when a gentle southerly breeze sprang up, which would enable them to make such a port, westward from their then position, they made the attempt. For a time it looked as if they would succeed, but they had a great headland jutting out in front which they must get round, and their ability to do this was doubtful. So they kept close in shore and weathered the point. But before they had made their harbour the wind suddenly chopped round, as is frequent off

that coast, and the gentle southerly breeze turned into a fierce squall from the north-east or thereabouts, sweeping down from the Cretan mountains. That began their troubles. To make the port was impossible. The unwieldy vessel could not 'face the wind,' and so they had to run before it. It would carry them in a south-westerly direction, and towards a small island, under the lee of which they might hope for some shelter. Here they had a little breathing time, and could make things rather more ship-shape than they had been able to do when suddenly caught by the squall. Their boat had been towing behind them, and had to be hoisted on deck somehow.

A more important, and probably more difficult, task was to get strong hawsers under the keel and round the sides, so as to help to hold the timbers together. The third thing was the most important of all, and has been misunderstood by commentators who knew more about Greek lexicons than ships. The most likely explanation of 'lowering the gear' (Rev. Ver.) is that it means 'leaving up just enough of sail to keep the ship's head to the wind, and bringing down everything else that could be got down' (Ramsay, *St. Paul*, p. 329).

Note that Luke says 'we' about hauling in the boat, and 'they' about the other tasks. He and the other passengers could lend a hand in the former, but not in the latter, which required more skilled labour. The reason for bringing down all needless top-hamper, and leaving up a little sail, was to keep the vessel from driving on to the great quicksands off the African coast, to which they would certainly have been carried if the wind held.

As soon as they had drifted out from the lee of the

friendly little island they were caught again in the storm. They were in danger of going down. As they drifted they had their 'starboard' broadside to the force of the wild sea, and it was a question how long the vessel's sides would last before they were stove in by the hammering of the waves, or how long she would be buoyant enough to ship seas without foundering. The only chance was to lighten her, so first the crew 'jettisoned' the cargo, and next day, as that did not give relief enough, 'they,' or, according to some authorities, 'we'—that is passengers and all—threw everything possible overboard.

That was the last attempt to save themselves, and after it there was nothing to do but to wait the apparently inevitable hour when they would all go down together. Idleness feeds despair, and despair nourishes idleness. Food was scarce, cooking it was impossible, appetite there was none. The doomed men spent the long idle days—which were scarcely day, so thick was the air with mist and foam and tempest—crouching anywhere for shelter, wet, tired, hungry, and hopeless. So they drifted 'for many days,' almost losing count of the length of time they had been thus. It was a gloomy company, but there was one man there in whom the lamp of hope burned when it had gone out in all others. Sun and stars were hidden, but Paul saw a better light, and *his* sky was clear and calm.

II. A common danger makes short work of distinctions of rank. In such a time some hitherto unnoticed man of prompt decision, resource, and confidence, will take the command, whatever his position. Hope, as well as timidity and fear, is infectious, and one cheery voice will revive the drooping spirits of a multitude. Paul had already established his personal

ascendency in that motley company of Roman soldiers, prisoners, sailors, and disciples. Now he stands forward with calm confidence, and infuses new hope into them all. What a miraculous change passes on externals when faith looks at them! The circumstances were the same as they had been for many days. The wind was howling and the waves pounding as before, the sky was black with tempest, and no sign of help was in sight, but Paul spoke, and all was changed, and a ray of sunshine fell on the wild waters that beat on the doomed vessel.

Three points are conspicuous in his strong tonic words. First, there is the confident assurance of safety. A less noble nature would have said more in vindication of the wisdom of his former advice. It is very pleasant to small minds to say, ‘Did I not tell you so? You see how right I was.’ But the Apostle did not care for petty triumphs of that sort. A smaller man might have sulked because his advice had not been taken, and have said to himself, ‘They would not listen to me before, I will hold my tongue now.’ But the Apostle only refers to his former counsel and its confirmation in order to induce acceptance of his present words.

It is easy to ‘bid’ men ‘be of good cheer,’ but futile unless some reason for good cheer is given. Paul gave good reason. No man’s life was to be lost though the ship was to go. He had previously predicted that life, as well as ship and lading, would be lost if they put to sea. That opinion was the result of his own calculation of probabilities, as he lets us understand by saying that he ‘perceived’ it (ver. 10). Now he speaks with authority, not from his perception, but from God’s assurance. The bold words might well seem folly

to the despairing crew as they caught them amidst the roar of tempest and looked at their battered hulk. So Paul goes at once to tell the ground of his confidence—the assurance of the angel of God.

What a contrast between the furious gale, the almost foundering ship, the despair in the hearts of the sleeping company, and the bright vision that came to Paul! Peter in prison, Paul in Cæsarea and now in the storm, see the angel form calm and radiant. God's messengers are wont to come into the darkest of our hours and the wildest of our tempests.

Paul's designation of the heavenly messenger as 'an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve,' recalls Jonah's confession of faith, but far surpasses it, in the sense of belonging to God, and in the ardour of submission and of active obedience, expressed in it. What Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. vi. 19) he realised for himself: 'Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price.' To recognise that we are God's, joyfully to yield ourselves to Him, and with all the forces of our natures to serve Him, is to bring His angel to our sides in every hour of tempest and peril, and to receive assurance that nothing shall by any means harm us. To yield ourselves to be God's is to make God ours. It was because Paul owned that he belonged to God, and served Him, that the angel came to him, and he explains the vision to his hearers by his relation to God. Anything was possible rather than that his God should leave him unhelped at such an hour of need.

The angel's message must have included particulars unnoticed in Luke's summary; as, for instance, the wreck on 'a certain island.' But the two salient points in it are the certainty of Paul's own preservation, that

the divine purpose of his appearing before Cæsar might be fulfilled, and the escape of all the ship's company. As to the former, we may learn how Paul's life, like every man's, is shaped according to a divine plan, and how we are 'immortal till our work is done,' and till God has done His work in and on and by us. As to the latter point, we may gather from the word '*has given*' the certainty that Paul had been praying for the lives of all that sailed with him, and may learn, not only that the prayers of God's servants are a real element in determining God's dealings with men, but that a true servant of God's will ever reach out his desires and widen his prayers to embrace those with whom he is brought into contact, be they heathens, persecutors, rough and careless, or fellow-believers. If Christian people more faithfully discharged the duty of intercession, they would more frequently receive in answer the lives of 'all them that sail with' them over the stormy ocean of life.

The third point in the Apostle's encouraging speech is the example of his own faith, which is likewise an exhortation to the hearers to exercise the same. If God speaks by His angel with such firm promises, man's plain wisdom is to grasp the divine assurance with a firm hand. We must build rock upon rock. 'I believe God,' that surely is a credence demanded by common sense and warranted by the sanest reason. If we do so believe, and take His word as the infallible authority revealing present duty and future blessings, then, however lowering the sky, and wild the water, and battered the vessel, and empty of earthly succour the gloomy horizon, and heavy our hearts, we shall 'be of good cheer,' and in due time the event will warrant our faith in God and His promise, even though all around

us seems to make our faith folly and our hope a mockery.

A SHORT CONFESSION OF FAITH

'... There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.'—ACTS xxvii. 23.

I TURN especially to those last words, 'Whose I am and whom I serve.'

A great calamity, borne by a crowd of men in common, has a wonderful power of dethroning officials and bringing the strong man to the front. So it is extremely natural, though it has been thought to be very unhistorical, that in this story of Paul's shipwreck he should become guide, counsellor, inspirer, and a tower of strength; and that centurions and captains and all the rest of those who held official positions should shrink into the background. The natural force of his character, the calmness and serenity that came from his faith—these things made him the leader of the bewildered crowd. One can scarcely help contrasting this shipwreck—the only one in the New Testament—with that in the Old Testament. Contrast Jonah with Paul, the guilty stupor of the one, down 'in the sides of the ship' cowering before the storm, with the calm behaviour and collected courage of the other.

The vision of which the Apostle speaks does not concern us here, but in the words which I have read there are several noteworthy points. They bring vividly before us the essence of true religion, the bold confession which it prompts, and the calmness and security which it ensures. Let us then look at them from these points of view.

I. We note the clear setting forth of the essence of true religion.

Remember that Paul is speaking to heathens; that his present purpose is not to preach the Gospel, but to make his own position clear. So he says ‘the God’—never mind who *He* is at present—‘the God to whom I belong’—that covers all the inward life—‘and whom I serve’—that covers all the outward.

‘Whose I am.’ That expresses the universal truth that men belong to God by virtue of their being the creatures of His hand. As the 100th Psalm says, according to one, and that a probably correct reading, ‘It is He that hath made us, and *we are His*.’ But the Apostle is going a good deal deeper than any such thoughts, which he, no doubt, shared in common with the heathen men around him, when he declares that, in a special fashion, God had claimed him for His, and he had yielded to the claim. ‘I am Thine,’ is the deepest thought of this man’s mind and the deepest feeling of his heart. And that is godliness in its purest form, the consciousness of belonging to God. We must interpret this saying by others of the Apostle’s, such as, ‘Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your bodies and spirits which are His.’ He traces God’s possession of him, not to that fact of creation (which establishes a certain outward relationship, but nothing more), nor even to the continuous facts of benefits showered upon his head, but to the one transcendent act of the divine Love, which gave itself to us, and so acquired us for itself. For we must recognise as the deepest of all thoughts about the relations of spiritual beings, that, as in regard to ourselves in our earthly affections, so in regard to our relations with

God, there is only one way by which a spirit can own a spirit, whether it be a man on the one side and a woman on the other, or whether it be God on the one side and a man on the other, and that one way is by the sweetness of complete and reciprocal love. He who gives himself to God gets God for himself. So when Paul said, 'Whose I am,' he was thinking that he would never have belonged either to God or to himself unless, first of all, God, in His own Son, had given Himself to Paul. The divine ownership of us is only realised when we are consciously His, because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, God does not count that a man belongs to Him simply because He made him, if the man does not feel his dependence, his obligation, and has not surrendered himself. He in the heavens loves you and me too well to care for a formal and external ownership. He desires hearts, and only they who have yielded themselves unto God, moved thereto by the mercies of God, and especially by the encyclopaediacal mercy which includes all the rest in its sweep, only they belong to Him, in the estimate of the heavens.

And if you and I are His, then that involves that we have deposed from his throne the rebel Self, the ancient Anarch that disturbs and ruins us. They who belong to God cease to live to themselves. There are two centres for human life, and I believe there are only two—the one is God, the other is my wretched self. And if we are swept, as it were, out of the little orbit that we move in, when the latter is our centre, and are drawn by the weight and mass of the great central sun to become its satellites, then we move in a nobler orbit and receive fuller and more blessed light and warmth. They who have themselves for their

centres are like comets, with a wide elliptical course, which carries them away out into the cold abysses of darkness. They who have God for their sun are like planets. The old fable is true of these ‘sons of the morning’—they make music as they roll and they flash back His light.

And then do not let us forget that this yielding of one’s self to Him, swayed by His love, and this surrendering of will and purpose and affection and all that makes up our complex being, lead directly to the true possession of Him and the true possession of ourselves.

I have said that the only way by which spirit possesses spirit is by love, and that it must needs be on both sides. So we get God for ourselves when we give ourselves to God. There is a wonderful alternation of giving and receiving between the loving God and his beloved lovers; first the impartation of the divine to the human, then the surrender of the human to the divine, and then the larger gift of God to man, just as in some series of mirrors the light is flashed back from the one to the other, in bewildering manifoldness and shimmering of rays from either polished surface. God is ours when we are God’s. ‘And this is the covenant that I will make with them after these days, saith the Lord. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’

And, in like manner, we never own ourselves until we have given ourselves to God. Each of us is like some feudatory prince, dependent upon an overlord. His subjects in his little territory rebel, and he has no power to subdue the insurgents, but he can send a message to the capital, and get the army of the king, who is his sovereign and theirs, to come down and

bring them back to order, and establish his tottering throne. So if you desire to own yourself or to know the sweetness that you may get out of your own nature and the exercise of your powers, if you desire to be able to govern the realm within, put yourself into God's hands and say, 'I am Thine; hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.'

I need not say more than just a word about the other side of Paul's confession of faith, 'Whom I serve.' He employs the word which means the service of a worshipper, or even of a priest, and not that which means the service of a slave. His purpose was to represent how, as his whole inward nature bowed in submission to, and was under the influence of, God to whom he belonged, so his whole outward life was a life of devotion. He was serving Him there in the ship, amidst the storm and the squalor and the terror. His calmness was service; his confidence was service; the cheery words that he was speaking to these people were service. And on his whole life he believed that this was stamped, that he was devoted to God. So *there* is the true idea of a Christian life, that in all its aspects, attitudes, and acts it is to be a manifestation, in visible form, of inward devotion to, and ownership by, God. All our work may be worship, and we may 'pray without ceasing,' though no supplications come from our lips, if our hearts are in touch with Him and through our daily life we serve and honour Him. God's priests never are far away from their altar, and never are without, somewhat to offer, as long as they have the activities of daily duty and the difficulties of daily conflict to bring to Him and spread before Him.

II. So let me turn for a moment to some of the other aspects of these words to which I have already

referred. I find in them, next, the bold confession which true religion requires.

Shipboard is a place where people find out one another very quickly. Character cannot well be hid there. And such circumstances as Paul had been in for the last fortnight, tossing up and down in *Adria*, with Death looking over the bulwarks of the crazy ship every moment, were certain to have brought out the inmost secrets of character. Paul durst not have said to these people ‘the God whose I am and whom I serve’ if he had not known that he had been living day by day a consistent and godly life amongst them.

And so, I note, first of all, that this confession of individual and personal relationship to God is incumbent on every Christian. We do not need to be always brandishing it before people’s faces. There is very little fear of the average Christian of this day blundering on that side. But we need, still less, to be always hiding it away. One hears a great deal from certain quarters about a religion that does not need to be vocal but shows what it is, without the necessity for words. Blessed be God! there *is* such a religion, but you will generally find that the people who have most of it are the people who are least tongue-tied when opportunity arises; and that if they have been witnessing for God in their quiet discharge of duty, with their hands instead of their lips, they are quite as ready to witness with their lips when it is fitting that they should do so. And surely, surely, if a man belongs to God, and if his whole life is to be the manifestation of the ownership that he recognises, that which specially reveals him—viz., his own articulate speech—cannot be left out of his methods of manifestation.

I am afraid that there are a great many professing Christian people nowadays who never, all their lives, have said to any one, ‘The God whose I am and whom I serve.’ And I beseech you, dear brethren, suffer this word of exhortation. To say so is a far more effectual, or at least more powerful, means of appeal than any direct invitation to share in the blessings. You may easily offend a man by saying to him, ‘Won’t you be a Christian too?’ But it is hard to offend if you simply say that *you are* a Christian. The statement of personal experience is more powerful by far than all argumentation or eloquence or pleading appeals. We do more when we say, ‘That which we have tasted and felt and handled of the Word of Life, declare we unto you,’ than by any other means.

Only remember that the avowal must be backed up by a life, as Paul’s was backed up on board that vessel. For unless it is so, the profession does far more harm than good. There are always keen critics round us, especially if we say that we are Christians. There were keen critics on board that ship. Do you think that these Roman soldiers, and the other prisoners, would not have smiled contemptuously at Paul, if this had been the first time that they had any reason to suppose that he was at all different from them? They would have said, ‘The God whose *you are* and whom *you serve*? Why, *you are* just the same sort of man as if *you worshipped Jupiter like the rest of us!*’ And that is what the world has a right to say to Christian people. The clearer our profession, the holier must be our lives.

III. Last of all, I find in these words the calmness and security which true religion secures.

The story, as I have already glanced at it in my

introductory remarks, brings out very wonderfully and very beautifully Paul's promptitude, his calmness in danger, his absolute certainty of safety, and his unselfish thoughtfulness about his companions in peril. And all these things were the direct results of his entire surrender to God, and of the consistency of his daily life. It needed the angel in the vision to assure him that his life would be spared. But whether the angel had ever come or not, and though death had been close at his hand, the serenity and the peaceful assurance of safety which come out so beautifully in the story would have been there all the same. The man who can say 'I belong to God' does not need to trouble himself about dangers. He will have to exercise his common sense, as the Apostle shows us; he will have to use all the means that are in his power for the accomplishment of ends that he knows to be right and legitimate. But having done all that, he can say, 'I belong to Him,' it is His business to look after His own property. He is not going to hold His possessions with such a slack hand as that they shall slip between His fingers, and be lost in the mire. 'Thou wilt not lose the souls that are Thine in the grave, neither wilt Thou suffer the man whom Thou lovest to see corruption.' God keeps His treasures, and the surer we are that He is able to keep them unto that day, the calmer we may be in all our trouble.

And the safety that followed was also the direct result of the relationship of mutual possession and love established between God and the Apostle. We do not know to which of the two groups of the shipwrecked Paul belonged; whether he could swim or whether he had to hold on to some bit of floating wreckage or other, and so got 'safe to land.' But whichever way it

was, it was neither his swimming nor the spar to which, perhaps, he clung, that landed him safe on shore. It was the God to whom he belonged. Faith is the true lifebelt that keeps us from being drowned in any stormy sea. And if you and I feel that we are His, and live accordingly, we shall be calm amid all change, serene when others are troubled, ready to be helpers of others even when we ourselves are in distress. And when the crash comes, and the ship goes to pieces: 'so it will come to pass that, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, they all come safe to land,' and when the Owner counts His subjects and possessions on the quiet shore, as the morning breaks, there will not be one who has been lost in the surges, or whose name will be unanswered to when the muster-roll of the crew is called.

A TOTAL WRECK, ALL HANDS SAVED

'And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. 33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health; for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. 39. And when it was day, they knew not the land; but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the main-sail to the wind, and made toward shore. 41. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground: and the fore part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. 42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose: and commanded that they which could

swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land; 41. And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.—ACTS xxvii. 30-44.

THE Jews were not seafaring people. Their coast had no safe harbours, and they seldom ventured on the Mediterranean. To find Paul in a ship with its bow pointed westwards is significant. It tells of the expansion of Judaism into a world-wide religion, and of the future course of Christianity. The only Old Testament parallel is Jonah, and the dissimilarities of the two incidents are as instructive as are their resemblances.

This minute narrative is evidently the work of one of the passengers who knew a good deal about nautical matters. It reads like a log-book. But as James Smith has well noted in his interesting monograph on the chapter, the writer's descriptions, though accurate, are unprofessional, thus confirming Luke's authorship. Where had the 'beloved physician' learned so much about the sea and ships? Did the great galleys carry surgeons as now? At all events the story is one of the most graphic accounts ever written. This narrative begins when the doomed ship has cast anchor, with a rocky coast close under her lee. The one question is, Will the four anchors hold? No wonder that the passengers longed for daylight!

The first point is the crew's dastardly trick to save themselves, frustrated by Paul's insight and promptitude. The pretext for getting into the boat was specious. Anchoring by the bow as well as by the stern would help to keep the ship from driving ashore; and if once the crew were in the boat and pulled as far as was necessary to lay out the anchors, it would be easy, under cover of the darkness, to make

good their escape on shore and leave the landsmen on board to shift for themselves. The boat must have been of considerable size to hold the crew of so large a ship. It was already lying alongside, and landsmen would not suspect what lay under the apparently brave attempt to add to the vessel's security, but Paul did so. His practical sagacity was as conspicuous a trait as his lofty enthusiasm. Common sense need not be divorced from high aims or from the intensest religious self-devotion. The idealist beat the practical centurion in penetrating the sailors' scheme.

That must have been a great nature which combined such different characteristics as the Apostle shows. Unselfish devotion is often wonderfully clear-sighted as to the workings of its opposite. The Apostle's promptitude is as noticeable as his penetration. He wastes no time in remonstrance with the cowards, who would have been over the side and off in the dark while he talked, but goes straight to the man in authority. Note, too, that he keeps his place as a prisoner. It is not his business to suggest what is to be done. That might have been resented as presumptuous; but he has a right to point out the danger, and he leaves the centurion to settle how to meet it. Significantly does he say 'ye,' not 'we.' He was perfectly certain that he 'must be brought before Cæsar'; and though he believed that all on board would escape, he seems to regard his own safety as even more certain than that of the others.

The lesson often drawn from his words is rightly drawn. They imply the necessity of men's action in order to carry out God's purpose. The whole shipful are to be saved, but 'except these abide . . . ye cannot be saved.' The belief that God wills anything is a

reason for using all means to effect it, not for folding our hands and saying, ‘God will do it, whether we do anything or not.’ The line between fatalism and Christian reliance on God’s will is clearly drawn in Paul’s words.

Note too the prompt, decisive action of the soldiers. They waste no words, nor do they try to secure the sailors, but out with their knives and cut the tow-rope, and away into the darkness drifts the boat. It might have been better to have kept it, as affording a chance of safety for all; but probably it was wisest to get rid of it at once. Many times in every life it is necessary to sacrifice possible advantages in order to secure a more necessary good. The boat has to be let go if the passengers in the ship are to be saved. Misused good things have sometimes to be given up in order to keep people from temptation.

The next point brings Paul again to the front. In the night he had been the saviour of the whole ship-load of people. Now as the twilight is beginning, and the time for decisive action will soon be here with the day, he becomes their encourager and counsellor. Again his saving common sense is shown. He knew that the moment for intense struggle was at hand, and so he prepares them for it by getting them to eat a substantial breakfast. It was because of his faith that he did so. His religion did not lead him to do as some people would have done—begin to talk to the soldiers about their souls—but he looked after their bodies. Hungry, wet, sleepless, they were in no condition to scramble through the surf, and the first thing to be done was to get some food into them. Of course he does not mean that they had eaten absolutely nothing for a fortnight, but only that they

had had scanty nourishment. But Paul's religion went harmoniously with his care for men's bodies. He 'gave thanks to God in presence of them all'; and who shall say that that prayer did not touch hearts more deeply than religious talk would have done? Paul's calmness would be contagious; and the root of it, in his belief in what his God had told him, would be impressively manifested to all on board. Moods are infectious; so 'they were all of good cheer,' and no doubt things looked less black after a hearty meal.

A little point may be noticed here, namely, the naturalness of the insertion of the numbers on board at this precise place in the narrative. There would probably be a muster of all hands for the meal, and in view of the approaching scramble, in order that, if they got to shore, there might be certainty as to whether any were lost. So here the numbers come in. They were still not without hope of saving the ship, though Paul had told them it would be lost; and so they jettison the cargo of wheat from Alexandria. By this time it is broad day and something must be done.

The next point is the attempt to beach the vessel. 'They knew not the land,' that is, the part of the coast where they had been driven; but they saw that, while for the most part it was iron-bound, there was a shelving sandy bay at one point on to which it might be possible to run her ashore. The Revised Version gives a much more accurate and seaman-like account than the Authorised Version does. The anchors were not taken on board, but to save time and trouble were 'left in the sea,' the cables being simply cut. The 'rudder-bands'—that is, the lashings which had secured the two paddle-like rudders, one

on either beam, which had been tied up to be out of the way when the stern anchors were put out—are loosed, and the rudders drop into place. The foresail (not ‘mainsail,’ as the Authorised Version has it) is set to help to drive the ship ashore. It is all exactly what we should expect to be done.

But an unexpected difficulty met the attempt, which is explained by the lie of the coast at St. Paul’s Bay, Malta, as James Smith fully describes in his book. A little island, separated from the mainland by a channel of not more than one hundred yards in breadth, lies off the north-east point of the bay, and to a beholder at the entrance to the bay looks as if continuous with it. When the ship got farther in, they would see the narrow channel, through which a strong current sets and makes a considerable disturbance as it meets the run of the water in the bay. A bank of mud has been formed at the point of meeting. Thus not only the water shoals, but the force of the current through the narrows would hinder the ship from getting past it to the beach. The two things together made her ground, ‘stem on’ to the bank; and then, of course, the heavy sea running into the bay, instead of helping her to the shore, began to break up the stern which was turned towards it.

Common peril makes beasts of prey and their usual victims crouch together. Benefits received touch generous hearts. But the legionaries on board had no such sentiments. Paul’s helpfulness was forgotten. A still more ignoble exhibition of the instinct of self-preservation than the sailors had shown dictated that cowardly, cruel suggestion to kill the prisoners. Brutal indifference to human life, and Rome’s iron discipline holding terror over the legionaries’ heads,

are vividly illustrated in the ‘counsel.’ So were Paul’s kindnesses requited! It is hard to melt rude natures even by kindness; and if Paul had been looking for gratitude he would have been disappointed, as we so often are. But if we do good to men because we expect requital, even in thankfulness, we are not pure in motive. ‘Looking for nothing again’ is the spirit enforced by God’s pattern and by experience.

The centurion had throughout, like most of his fellows in Scripture, been kindly disposed, and showed more regard for Paul than the rank and file did. He displays the good side of militarism, while they show its bad side; for he is collected, keeps his head in extremities, knows his own mind, holds the reins in a firm hand, even in that supreme moment, has a quick eye to see what must be done, and decision to order it at once. It was prudent to send first those who could swim; they could then help the others. The distance was short, and as the bow was aground, there would be some shelter under the lee of the vessel, and shoal water, where they could wade, would be reached in a few minutes or moments.

‘And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safe to the land.’ So Paul had assured them they would. God needs no miracles in order to sway human affairs. Everything here was perfectly ‘natural,’ and yet His hand wrought through all, and the issue was His fulfilment of His promises. If we rightly look at common things, we shall see God working in them all, and believe that He can deliver us as truly without miracles as ever He did any by miracles. Promptitude, prudence, skill, and struggle with the waves, saved the whole two hundred and seventy-six souls in that battered ship; yet it was God who saved them all.

Whether Paul was among the party that could swim, or among the more helpless who had to cling to anything that would float, he was held up by God's hand, and it was He who 'sent from above, took him, and drew him out of many waters.'

AFTER THE WRECK

'And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. 7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. 8. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. 9. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: 10. Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. 11. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. 12. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. 13. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli; 14. Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. 15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. 16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.'—ACTS xxviii. 1-16.

'THEY all escaped safe to land,' says Luke with emphasis, pointing to the verification of Paul's assurance that there should be no loss of life. That two hundred and seventy-six men on a wreck should all be saved was very improbable, but the angel had promised, and Paul had believed that it should be 'even so as it had been spoken unto him.' Therefore the improbable came to pass, and every man of the ship's company

stood safe on the shore. Faith which grasps God's promise 'laughs at impossibilities' and brings them into the region of facts.

Wet, cold, weary, and anxious, the rescued men huddled together on the shore in the early morning, and no doubt they were doubtful what reception they would have from the islanders who had been attracted to the beach. Their first question was, 'Where are we?' so completely had they lost their reckoning. Some of the inhabitants could speak Greek or Latin, and could tell them that they were on Melita, but the most part of the crowd that came round them could only speak in a tongue strange to Luke, and are therefore called by him 'barbarians,' not as being uncivilised, but as not speaking Greek. But they could speak the eloquent language of kindness and pity. They were heathens, but they were men. They had not come down to the wreck for plunder, as might have been feared, but to help the unfortunates who were shivering on the beach in the downpour of rain, and chilled to the bone by exposure.

As always, Paul fills Luke's canvas; the other two hundred and seventy-five were ciphers. Two incidents, in which the Apostle appears as protected by God from danger, and as a fountain of healing for others, are all that is told of the three months' stay in Malta. Taken together, these cover the whole ground of the Christian's place in the world; he is an object of divine care, he is a medium of divine blessing. In the former one, we see in Paul's activity in gathering his bundle of brushwood an example of how he took the humblest duties on himself, and was not hindered either by the false sense of dignity which keeps smaller men from doing small things, as Chinese gentlemen

pride themselves on long nails as a token that they do no work, or by the helplessness in practical matters which is sometimes natural to, and often affected by, men of genius, from taking his share in common duties.

The shipwreck took place in November probably, and the 'viper' had curled itself up for its winter sleep, and had been lifted with the twigs by Paul's hasty hand. Roused by the warmth, it darted at Paul's hand before it could be withdrawn, and fixed its fangs. The sight of it dangling there excited suspicions in the mind of the natives, who would know that Paul was a prisoner, and so jumped to the conclusion that he was a murderer pursued by the Goddess of Justice. These rude islanders had consciences, which bore witness to a divine law of retribution.

However mistaken may be heathens' conceptions of what constitutes right and wrong, they all know that it is wrong to do wrong, and the dim anticipation of God-inflicted punishment is in their hearts. The swift change of opinion about Paul is like, though it is the reverse of, what the people of Lystra thought of him. *They* first took him for a god, and then for a criminal, worshipping him to-day and stoning him to-morrow. This teaches us how unworthy the heathen conception of a deity is, and how lightly the name was given. It may teach us too how fickle and easily led popular judgments are, and how they are ever prone to rush from one extreme to another, so that the people's idol of one week is their abhorrence the next, and the applause and execration are equally undeserved. These Maltese critics did what many of us are doing with less excuse—arguing as to men's merits from their calamities or successes. A good man may be

stung by a serpent in the act of doing a good thing; that does not prove him to be a monster. He may be unhurt by what seems fatal; that does not prove him to be a god or a saint.

The other incident recorded as occurring in Malta brings out the Christian's relation to others as a source of healing. An interesting incidental proof of Luke's accuracy is found in the fact that inscriptions discovered in Malta show that the official title of the governor was 'First of the Melitæans.' The word here rendered 'chief' is literally 'first.' Luke's precision is shown in another direction in his diagnosis of the diseases of Publius's father, which are described by technical medical terms. The healing seems to have been unasked. Paul 'went in,' as if from a spontaneous wish to render help. There is no record of any expectation or request from Publius.

Christians are to be 'like the dew on the grass, which waiteth not for man,' but falls unsought. The manner of the healing brings out very clearly its divine source, and Paul's part as being simply that of the channel for God's power. He prays, and then lays his hands on the sick man. There are no words assuring him of healing. God is invoked, and then His power flows through the hands of the suppliant. So with all our work for men in bringing the better cure with which we are entrusted, we are but channels of the blessing, pipes through which the water of life is brought to thirsty lips. Therefore prayer must precede and accompany all Christian efforts to communicate the healing of the Gospel; and the most gifted are but, like Paul, 'ministers through whom' faith and salvation come.

The argument from silence is precarious, but the entire omission of notice of evangelistic work in Melita is noteworthy. Probably the Apostle as a prisoner was not free to preach Christ in any public manner.

Ancient navigation was conducted in a leisurely fashion very strange to us. Three months' delay in the island, rendered necessary by wintry storms, would end about the early part of March, when the season for safe sailing began. So the third ship which was used in this voyage set sail. Luke notices its 'sign' as being that of the Twin Brethren, the patrons of sailors, whose images were, no doubt, displayed on the bow, just as to-day boats in that region often have a Madonna nailed on the mast. Strange conjunction—Castor and Pollux on the prow, and Paul on the deck!

Puteoli, on the bay of Naples, was the landing-place, and there, after long confinement with uncongenial companions, the three Christians, Paul, Aristarchus, and Luke, found brethren. We can understand the joy of such a meeting, and can almost hear the narrative of perils which would be poured into sympathetic ears. Observe that, according to what seems the true reading, verse 14 says, 'We were consoled among them, remaining seven days.' The centurion could scarcely delay his march to please the Christians at Puteoli; and the thought that the Apostle, whose spirit had never flagged while danger was near and effort was needed, felt some tendency to collapse, and required cheering when the strain was off, is as natural as it is pathetic.

So the whole company set off on their march to Rome—about a hundred and forty miles. The week's delay in Puteoli would give time for apprising the church in Rome of the Apostle's coming, and two

parties came out to meet him, one travelling as far as Appii Forum, about forty Roman miles from the city ; the other as far as ‘The Three Taverns,’ some ten miles nearer it. The simple notice of the meeting is more touching than many words would have been. It brings out again the Apostle’s somewhat depressed state, partly due, no doubt, to nervous tension during the long and hazardous voyage, and partly to his consciousness that the decisive moment was very near. But when he grasped the hands and looked into the faces of the Roman brethren, whom he had so long hungered to see, and to whom he had poured out his heart in his letter, he ‘thanked God, and took courage.’ The most heroic need, and are helped by, the sympathy of the humble. Luther was braced for the Diet of Worms by the knight who clapped him on the back as he passed in and spoke a hearty word of cheer.

There would be some old friends in the delegation of Roman Christians, perhaps some of those who are named in Romans xvi., such as Priscilla and Aquila, and the unnamed matron, Rufus’s mother, whom Paul there calls ‘his mother and mine.’ It would be an hour of love and effusion, and the shadow of appearing before Cæsar would not sensibly dim the brightness. Paul saw God’s hand in that glad meeting, as we should do in all the sweetness of congenial intercourse. It was not only because the welcomers were his friends that he was glad, but because they were Christ’s friends and servants. The Apostle saw in them the evidence that the kingdom was advancing even in the world’s capital, and under the shadow of Cæsar’s throne, and that gladdened him and made him forget personal anxieties. We too should be willing to sink our own interests in the joy of seeing the spread of Christ’s kingdom.

Paul turned thankfulness for the past and the present into calm hope for the future: 'He took courage.' There was much to discourage and to excuse tremors and forebodings, but he had God and Christ with him, and therefore he could front the uncertain future without flinching, and leave all its possibilities in God's hands. Those who have such a past as every Christian has should put fear far from them, and go forth to meet any future with quiet hearts, and minds kept in perfect peace because they are stayed on God.

THE LAST GLIMPSE OF PAUL

'And it came to pass, that, after three days, Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; 18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. 22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkst: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against. 23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. 24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. 25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esias the prophet unto our fathers, 26. Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. 29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. 30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—ACTS xxviii. 17-31.

WE have here our last certain glimpse of Paul. His ambition had long been to preach in Rome, but he

little knew how his desire was to be fulfilled. We too are often surprised at the shape which God's answers to our wishes take. Well for us if we take the unexpected or painful events which accomplish some long-cherished purpose as cheerfully and boldly as did Paul. We see him in this last glimpse as the centre of three concentric widening circles.

I. We have Paul and the leaders of the Roman synagogue. He was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. After such a voyage a pause would have been natural for a less eager worker; but three days were all that he allowed himself, and these would, no doubt, be largely occupied by intercourse with the Roman Christians, and with the multitude of little things to be looked after on entering on his new lodging. Paul had gifts that we have not, he exemplified many heroic virtues which we are not called on to repeat; but he had eminently the prosaic virtue of diligence and persistence in work, and the humblest life affords a sphere in which that indispensable though homely excellence of his can be imitated. What a long holiday some of us would think we had earned, if we had come through what Paul had encountered since he left Cæsarea!

The summoning of the 'chief of the Jews' to him was a prudent preparation for his trial rather than an evangelistic effort. It was important to ascertain their feelings, and if possible to secure their neutrality in regard to the approaching investigation. Hence the Apostle seeks to put his case to them so as to show his true adherence to the central principles of Judaism, insisting that he is guiltless of revolt against either the nation or the law and traditional observances; that he had been found innocent by the Palestinian

representatives of Roman authority; that his appeal to Cæsar, which would naturally seem hostile to the rulers in Jerusalem, was not meant as an accusation of the nation to which he felt himself to belong, and so was no sign of deficient patriotism, but had been forced on him as his only means of saving his life.

It was a difficult course which he had to steer, and he picked his way between the shoals with marvellous address. But his explanation of his position is not only a skilful piece of *apologia*, but it embodies one of his strongest convictions, which it is worth our while to grasp firmly; namely, that Christianity is the true fulfilment and perfecting of the old revelation. His declaration that, so far from his being a deserter from Israel, he was a prisoner just because he was true to the Messianic hope which was Israel's highest glory, was not a clever piece of special pleading meant for the convincing of the Roman Jews, but was a principle which runs through all his teaching. Christians were the true Jews. He was not a recreant in confessing, but they were deserters in denying, the fulfilment in Jesus of the hope which had shone before the generation of 'the fathers.' The chain which bound him to the legionary who 'kept him,' and which he held forth as he spoke, was the witness that he was still 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews.'

The heads of the Roman synagogue went on the tack of non-committal, as was quite natural. They were much too astute to accept at once an *ex parte* statement, and so took refuge in professing ignorance. Probably they knew a good deal more than they owned. Their statement has been called 'unhistorical,' and, oddly enough, has been used to discredit Luke's narrative. It is a remarkable canon of criticism that

a reporter is responsible for the truthfulness of assertions which he reports, and that, if he has occasion to report truthfully an untruth, he is convicted of the untruth which he truthfully reports. Luke is responsible for telling what these people found it convenient to say; they are responsible for its veracity. But they did not say quite as much as is sometimes supposed. As the Revised Version shows, they simply said that they had not had any official deputation or report about Paul, which is perfectly probable, as it was extremely unlikely that any ship leaving after Paul's could have reached Italy. They may have known a great deal about him, but they had no information to act upon about his trial. Their reply is plainly shaped so as to avoid expressing any definite opinion or pledging themselves to any course of action till they do hear from 'home.'

They are politely cautious, but they cannot help letting out some of their bile in their reference to 'this sect.' Paul had said nothing about it, and their allusion betrays a fuller knowledge of him and it than it suited their plea for delay to own. Their wish to hear what he thought sounded very innocent and impartial, but was scarcely the voice of candid seekers after truth. They must have known of the existence of the Roman Church, which included many Jews, and they could scarcely be ignorant of the beliefs on which it was founded; but they probably thought that they would hear enough from Paul in the proposed conference to enable them to carry the synagogue with them in doing all they could to procure his condemnation. He had hoped to secure at least their neutrality; they seem to have been preparing to join his enemies. The request for full exposition of a prisoner's belief

has often been but a trap to ensure his martyrdom. But we have to 'be ready to give to every man a reason for the hope that is in us,' even when the motive for asking it may be anything but the sincere desire to learn.

II. Therefore Paul was willing to lay his heart's belief open, whatever doing so might bring. So the second circle forms round him, and we have him preaching the Gospel to 'many' of the Jews. He could not go to the synagogue, so much of the synagogue came to him. The usual method was pursued by Paul in arguing from the old revelation, but we may note the twofold manner of his preaching, 'testifying' and 'persuading,' the former addressed more to the understanding, and the latter to the affections and will, and may learn how Christian teachers should seek to blend both—to work their arguments, not in frost, but in fire, and not to bully or scold or frighten men into the Kingdom, but to draw them with cords of love. Persuasion without a basis of solid reasoning is puerile and impotent; reasoning without the warmth of persuasion is icy cold, and therefore nothing grows from it.

Note too the protracted labour 'from morning till evening.' One can almost see the eager disputants spending the livelong day over the rolls of the prophets, relays of Rabbis, perhaps, relieving one another in the assault on the one opponent's position, and he holding his ground through all the hours—a pattern for us teachers of all degrees.

The usual effects followed. The multitude was sifted by the Gospel, as its hearers always are, some accepting and some rejecting. These double effects ever follow it, and to one or other of these two classes we

each belong. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay; the same light is joy to sound eyes and agony to diseased ones; the same word is a savour of life unto life and a savour of death unto death; the same Christ is set for the fall and for the rising of men, and is to some the sure foundation on which they build secure, and to some the stone on which, stumbling, they are broken, and which, falling on them, grinds them to powder.

Paul's solemn farewell takes up Isaiah's words, already used by Jesus. It is his last recorded utterance to his brethren after the flesh, weighty, and full of repressed yearning and sorrow. It is heavy with prophecy, and marks an epoch in the sad, strange history of that strange nation. Israel passes out of sight with that dread sentence fastened to its breast, like criminals of old, on whose front was fixed the record of their crimes and their condemnation. So this tragic self-exclusion from hope and life is the end of all that wondrous history of ages of divine revelation and patience, and of man's rebellion. The Gospel passes to the Gentiles, and the Jew shuts himself out. So it has been for nineteen centuries. Was not that scene in Paul's lodging in Rome the end of an epoch and the prediction of a sad future?

III. Not less significant and epoch-making is the glimpse of Paul which closes the Acts. We have the third concentric circle—Paul and the multitudes who came to his house and heard the Gospel. We note two points here. First, that his unhindered preaching in the very heart of the world's capital for two whole years is, in one aspect, the completion of the book. As Bengel tersely says, 'The victory of the word of God, Paul at Rome. The apex of the Gospel, the end of Acts.'

But, second, as clearly, the ending is abrupt, and is not a satisfying close. The lengthened account of the whole process of Paul's imprisonments and hearings before the various Roman authorities is most unintelligible if Luke intended to break off at the very crucial point, and say nothing about the event to which he had been leading up for so many chapters. There is much probability in Ramsay's suggestion that Luke intended to write a third book, containing the account of the trial and subsequent events, but was prevented by causes unknown, perhaps by martyrdom. Be that as it may, these two verses, with some information pieced out of the Epistles written during the imprisonment, are all that we know of Paul's life in Rome. From Philippians we learn that the Gospel spread by reason of the earlier stages of his trial. From the other Epistles we can collect some particulars of his companions, and of the oversight which he kept up of the Churches.

The picture here drawn lays hold, not on anything connected with his trial, but on his evangelistic activity, and shows us how, notwithstanding all hindrances, anxieties about his fate, weariness, and past toils, the flame of evangelistic fervour burned undimmed in 'Paul the aged,' as the flame of mistaken zeal had burned in the 'young man named Saul,' and how the work which had filled so many years of wandering and homelessness was carried on with all the old joyfulness, confidence, and success, from the prisoner's lodging. In such unexpected fashion did God fulfil the Apostle's desire to 'preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.' To preach the word with all boldness is the duty of us Christians who have entered into the heritage of fuller freedom than Paul's, and of whom

it is truer than of him that we can do it, 'no man forbidding' us.

PAUL IN ROME

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—ACTS xxviii. 30, 31.

So ends this book. It stops rather than ends. Many reasons might be suggested for closing here. Probably the simplest is the best, that nothing more is said for nothing more had yet been done. Probably the book was written during these two years. This abrupt close suggests several noteworthy thoughts.

I. The true theme of the book.

How convenient if Luke had told us a little more! But Paul's history is unfinished, like Peter's and John's. This book's treatment of all the Apostles teaches, as we have often had to remark, that Christ and His acts are its true subject.

We are wise if we learn the lesson of keeping all human teachers, even a Paul, in their inferior place, and if we say of each of them: 'He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light.'

II. God's unexpected and unwelcome ways of fulfilling our desires, and His purposes.

It had long been Paul's dream to 'see Rome.' How little he knew the steps by which his dream was to be fulfilled! He told the Ephesian elders that he was going up to Jerusalem under compulsion of the Spirit, and 'not knowing the things that should befall him there,' except that he was certain of 'bonds and imprisonment.' He did not know that these were

God's way of bringing him to Rome. Jewish fury, Roman statecraft and law-abidingness, two years of a prison, a stormy voyage, a shipwreck, led him to his long-wished-for goal. God uses even man's malice and opposition to the Gospel to advance the progress of the Gospel. Men, like coral insects, build their little bit, all unaware of the whole of which it is a part, but the reef rises above the waves and ocean breaks against it in vain.

So we may gather lessons of submission, of patient acceptance of apparently adverse circumstances, and of quiet faith that He who 'makes stormy winds to fulfil His word and flaming fires His ministers,' will bend to the carrying out of His designs all things, be they seemingly friendly or hostile, and will realise our dreams, if in accordance with His will, even through events which seem to shatter them. Let us trust and be patient till we see the issues of events.

III. The world's mistaken estimate of greatness.

Who was the greatest man in Rome at that hour? Not the Cæsar but the poor Jewish prisoner. How astonished both would have been if they had been told the truth! The two kingdoms were, so to speak, set face to face in these two, their representatives, and neither of them knew his own relative importance. The Cæsar was all unaware that, for all his legions and his power, he was but 'a noise'; Paul was as unconscious that he was incomparably the most powerful of the influences that were then at work in the world. The haughty and stolid eyes of Romans saw in him nothing but a prisoner, sent up from a turbulent subject land on some obscure charge, a mere nobody. The crowds in forum and amphitheatre would have laughed at any one who had pointed to that humble 'hired house,' and

said, ‘There lodges a man who bears a word that will shatter and remould the city, the Empire, the world.’

Let us have confidence in the greatness of the word, though the world may be deaf to its music and blind to its power, and let us never fear to ally ourselves with a cause which we know to be God’s, however it may be unpopular and made light of by the ‘leaders of opinion.’

IV. The true relation between the Church and the State.

‘None forbidding him’ marks a great step forward. Paul’s unhindered freedom of speech in Rome itself marks ‘the victory of the word, the apex of the Gospel.’ The neutral attitude of the imperial power was, indeed, broken by subsequent persecutions, but we may say that on the whole Rome let Christianity alone. That is the best service that the State can render to the Church. Anything more is help which encumbers and is harmful to the true spiritual power of the Gospel. The real requirement which it makes on the civil power is simply what the Greek philosopher asked of the king who was proffering his good offices, ‘Stand out of the sunshine!'









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